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"He suddenly gave an impatient jerk, and raising his arm strove to deal a blow at his nurse."

Page 52.

BELLE;

OR,

THE PROMISED BLESSING.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "TIMID LUCY."

Cornelia Tuttle (Pierson)

"Honor thy father and thy mother."

NEW YORK:

DANIEL DANA, JR., 381 BROADWAY.

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BELLE;

OR,

THE PROMISED BLESSING.

CHAPTER I.

THE WELCOME.

AFTER three years of weary separation from his wife and children, Mr. Cortlandt was once more to be welcomed home.

The hickory fire sent its cheerful blaze up the wide chimney, and flashed and flickered as if partaking of the general joy, while the polished tea equipage and the shining door knobs caught its bright rays, and returned an answering sparkle. Stretched back in an arm-chair, and resting his feet on the fender, sat Willy Cortlandt, the very picture of perfect contentment and quiet satisfaction.

While Willy was tranquilly enjoying the expectation of the pleasant re-union, so soon to take place, his sister Belle walked up and down the room in a state of eager impatience. Three years had made a great alteration in Belle Cortlandt, for they had changed the chubby little girl, who bade her father "good-bye," with a hearty hug and a shower of tears, into the slender miss, "just in her teens," who now so anxiously awaited his return.

"Where's mother?" asked Belle, after listening to the imaginary sound of wheels, and peering out in vain into the darkness for the twentieth time.

"Mother?" said Willy, rousing from his pleasant reverie, "Mother?—O, here she is!" and at that moment the door opened.

"Mother," that was just the name for Mrs. Cortlandt, for she had a face that told of love and tenderness, and there was a look in her blue eye, that made even the children of strangers nestle at her side, and take her hand in theirs.

Mrs. Cortlandt had hardly time to give an approving glance round the room, when the

sound of wheels was actually heard, and all hastened to welcome the wanderer.

"Thank God, I am at home again!" said a clear, strong voice, and the wife was clasped in her husband's arms, and the children received their father's kiss.

"Why, you are almost as tall as your mother, Belle," said Mr. Cortlandt, looking at his daughter, with astonishment and pride.

Belle's black eyes sparkled with pleasure, and, drawing her slender figure to its full height, she moved forward with a step that Willy was wont to call "the grand march of the generalissimo," and which his sister was apt to assume on important occasions.

Willy Cortlandt, though two years younger than Belle, had it in his power to tease her most unmercifully. His quiet sarcasms on the new airs of dignity and superiority, she had lately assumed, often put that dignity to flight, and brought forth a storm of angry words, which Willy heard with a calmness that only provoked the speaker the more.

Willy felt that this was no time for such

attacks, but the effect of his father's remark did not escape his notice, and he put it by in his store-house of ammunition for the warfare he so loved to wage.

A happy party sat round the tea-table at Oak-side that evening. As Mr. Cortlandt looked from face to face, he candidly thought his wife the sweetest woman in the world, and his children more than equal to his fondest expectations.

During the three years Mr. Cortlandt had been detained in China, in the transaction of the business that had called him from his home, he had been a close observer of men and manners, and he had many amusing particulars to tell of daily life among the Celestials.

The evening passed rapidly away in pleasant chat, and all were surprised when the clock struck eleven. "Belle," said Mrs. Cortlandt, "Belle, Willy, it is an hour past your usual bed-time—you may put the Bible on the table, daughter."

Mr. Cortlandt did not see the frown that suddenly clouded the bright face of Belle; he could

not know the rebellious murmur that throbbed at her heart, as she rose to execute her mother's wishes. That angry look did not escape the All-seeing Eye; that proud, stubborn heart was unveiled to Him whose holy book she now took in her hands.

Mr. Cortlandt opened the Bible to a Psalm of praise. His own feelings of devout gratitude broke forth in the words of royal David, and he read as those only can read who feel what they utter.

"How good and noble he looks! How beautifully he reads!" thought Belle; but her heart was dead to the feelings that filled the soul of her father and found a full response in that of his wife.

For a moment Belle was sobered by the voice of prayer. There was something in the way Mr. Cortlandt addressed the Supreme Being which seemed to make the reality of His presence felt.

To the God who had watched over him in his wanderings, and restored him in safety to his home, the husband and father poured out

his thanksgivings. For the wife of his bosom, for the children, dear as his heart's blood, he asked choice blessings from on high, and doubted not that his prayer was heard.

While heaven drew near to the true worshipper, and a blessing was pledged for those for whom he prayed, Belle was lost in her own wandering thoughts. Though on her knees, in the attitude of prayer, her mind was busy with memories of the past and with plans for the future.

The fervent "amen" which came from the lips of the mother, as Mr. Cortlandt closed, roused Belle from her musing, and she sprang from her knees with a start.

"Good-night, Belle," said the father, placing a candle in her hand, "Good-night, daughter; God bless you! Good-night, Willy!" and the children were gone.

Mr. and Mrs. Cortlandt talked long and late that night over the pleasant fire. "How lovely Belle is looking," said the husband, at the close of their conversation.

A shade passed over the expressive face of

the mother, as she replied, "Yes, Belle is very handsome, I think, and not at all vain."

The father noticed the momentary shadow, but forebore to question its cause. He observed the evasive answer, and dimly guessed its meaning. It passed like a cloud between him and the sunshine of his happy return.

CHAPTER II.

A SURPRISE.

SEVERAL weeks had passed pleasantly away since Mr. Cortlandt's return, and he had yet seen but little in Belle to justify the look of pain with which her mother heard her daughter's praise.

A real wintry storm was having its own way without; and within, something of the same kind seemed threatening.

Belle appeared at the breakfast-table in what might have passed with a casual observer as a silent mood, but the keen eye of her father did not overlook the unpleasant expression about her mouth, or the studied indifference with which she met all remarks addressed to herself.

"Belle," said the mother gently, when Mr. Cortlandt had left the breakfast-room—"Belle, I am sorry you will not be able to go into town

to-day—to the exhibition—it may be brighter to-morrow, and that will do as well, you know.”

“I don’t know any such thing,” said Belle, angrily. “I do not see why I am always to be disappointed. I think I am old enough to judge for myself, and I know I could go as well as not, if you would only let me.”

“I do not think it best for you to go to-day,” said Mrs. Cortlandt, quietly turning away.

“*You* think best,” said Belle, contemptuously. “Who do you think I am, that you talk to me as if I were a baby? I do think a mother is the greatest torment in life!”

The hall-door had been ajar during this conversation, and now it was suddenly thrown open, and Mr. Cortlandt stood on the threshold. “Belle!” said the father, in a tone where sternness and sorrow were mingled.

“Father!” retorted the angry girl, in a tone as stern as his own—and her large black eyes looked him full in the face, with a determined stare.

“My dear child, think what you are doing,” said the mother, earnestly.

"We can get on without your advice," said Belle, with another of those contemptuous looks.

Two strong hands were placed on the shoulders of the astonished girl, and before she could recover from her surprise, she was marched across the hall into the library opposite, the door was closed and locked, and she was left alone. It cost her a moment's thought to remember what all this was about. She had but spoken to her mother in a way to which she was too well accustomed, and yet a scene had occurred which seemed to make the matter of importance.

Shame and pride contended in her heart, as she thought of the look of reproof that had flashed from her father's eyes, but pride, alas! got the mastery.

Belle strove to calm her agitated feelings, and resolved to take a book and read, as if nothing unusual had happened. This was at first rather a difficult matter, but she had selected a volume of Scott's poems, as among her particular favorites, and she at length lost all knowledge of the flight of time, while poring over the "Lady of

the Lake." Meanwhile the mother had reluctantly confessed the increasing waywardness in Belle, which had latterly tried her sorely. While the father listened, both sorrow and indignation from time to time prevailed in his face.

"I think I shall subdue her in the end, by gentleness," said Mrs. Cortlandt. "A few years hence she will look back to this period as a wild dream."

"Yet in those few years, Mary," said the husband solemnly, "she may call down on herself the curse of offended Heaven. She shall not lay up for herself future retribution if I can help it. The undutiful child cannot be blessed even in this world, not to speak of that eternal ruin for which such unnatural conduct is a meet preparation."

"You do not know Belle, yet," said the mother earnestly. "She is ungovernable, but she is generous and affectionate, as you soon will see. Do not be harsh with her."

Mr. Cortlandt looked into the sweet face that pleaded for the erring child, and his displeasure

increased. "To be unkind and undutiful to such a mother," he exclaimed, "is a fearful sin! God grant the poor child may no longer call down on herself the punishment so repeatedly threatened in Scripture to such offenders. This career must have a sudden close, or it may end in woes temporal and eternal."

Mr. Cortlandt left the room with a decided step, and a determined air.

The hours passed on; the mother was not alone, for she was holding communion with an ever-present Friend. Earnestly she prayed for her wayward child, and implored the influence of the Spirit of grace to soften that proud, unrepentant heart.

Belle would have cast down her book, and thrown her arms about her mother's neck, if she could have seen that mother on her knees pleading for her; if she could have heard the words of deep, tender, unselfish affection in which blessings were invoked on her unworthy head. The daughter stifled the voice of conscience which bade her "repent and return," and no supernatural power opened her eyes to

behold the scene that would have melted even her proud heart.

When Mr. Cortlandt returned at noon he had a long and earnest conversation with his wife. While she still tenderly pleaded for the offender, she could not but own the justice and true affection which had made him determine to check his child, at once, in a habit of disrespect and disobedience, which, if indulged, must insure the displeasure of Heaven.

Belle had eaten the simple meal that had been sent to her, and was beginning to wonder, as the afternoon wore away, how long her confinement was to last.

About four o'clock her father entered the library carrying her cloak, furs, and all that she would need to guard her well against the clear, keen air that had followed the sleet of the morning.

"Get ready, as soon as possible, Belle," said the father soberly, but not sternly, and then he instantly left the room. All traces of the excitement of the morning had passed away from Belle, and she could easily have forgotten the

whole matter, if no farther notice had been taken of it. Her father's manner, however, roused her pride, and she resolved to obey in silence and ask no questions.

She was a little startled to find a stage-coach, laden with baggage, at the door, as she stepped forth with her father.

"Get in, Belle," said the voice of Mr. Cortlandt, and she mechanically obeyed.

There was a stir among the occupants of the coach, and a place was made for Belle on the back seat, while her father established himself beside an old gentleman in front.

There was something in that old gentleman's face which might have made a stranger willing to be his fellow-passenger for a time, and his conversation soon showed that it would be safe to choose his companionship, even for eternity.

Mr. Cortlandt's heart was too sad and agitated for him to have enjoyed any conversation on ordinary subjects, but the themes touched upon by his acquaintance ever found in him an echo. The prospects of the Missionary cause in China, the best method of reaching the

ignorant and degraded in every land, and the motives set before all Christians to join in efforts to spread the Gospel, were the subjects under discussion.

Belle forgot her father's displeasure and the singularity of her position, as she listened to the interesting remarks made by the old gentleman, and, for the first time, there was stirred within her a wish to do something in the great work of evangelizing the world. She had yet to realize that her first task was a painful and arduous one, nothing less than the bringing her own proud stubborn heart into the gentle spirit of the Gospel of peace. Painful, arduous, and even impossible such a task must have been, undertaken in her own strength, yet, with that unperformed, she was most unworthy even to think of laboring for and with God in the extension of His kingdom on earth.

Many miles of the hard, rough road had been passed over, when the stage-coach stopped before a mushroom hotel, which had lately sprung up by the way-side, fresh with whitewash, and shining with shutterless windows. The whole

party alighted, and Belle was shown into a little room in which the great clumsy bed looked much like a huge animal shut up in a narrow cage.

Belle took off her bonnet, and did not even notice that the looking-glass was hung too high for her to see her face in it, even if she stood on tip-toes, for matters of the toilet gave her very little uneasiness.

The great bell summoned the passengers to the tea-table. Again Mr. Cortlandt was occupied with the old gentleman, and Belle had no opportunity to speak to her father, excepting when he placed the candle in her hand, as he stood beside her in the hall, and bade her good-night, with his usual blessing. Then, she felt an impulse to ask his forgiveness and restoration to his favor. Pride made her hesitate, and stop in silence; and in a moment he was gone! Restoration to favor was what she wanted; she did not yet feel the need of forgiveness, for what seemed to her a trifling offence.

Belle looked out at the window that graced the head of the bed. The stars flashed in the

clear night air, and quiet reigned over hill and frost-browned meadow. But no voice spoke to Belle of Him who has numbered the stars, and fashioned the earth in beauty: it was of her human father she thought, as she said to herself impatiently, "It is of no use trying to ask his forgiveness; I do not mean to think of it again."

Mechanically she knelt, and repeated her evening prayer, and then, having put up her travelling shawl as an extempore curtain, she lay down to rest.

Sleep seemed to fly from her. Of her mother she would not think. With conjectures as to her probable destination she wearied herself, and on the conversation in the stage-coach she at length fixed her mind. The face of the old gentleman rose up before her, and she was struck anew with the wonderful charm in its pure, placid expression. Through it she dimly understood that old age is not necessarily ugly. Trials impatiently borne, cares struggled with in human strength, and evil passions indulged make the harsh lines which grow and deepen

with increasing years. "I wonder how I shall look when I am old?" she thought. Conscience would have given her a faithful reply, but she stifled its voice, and soon sank to rest to dream of being an old woman with a hooked nose, living in the little room she now occupied.

CHAPTER III.

THE JOURNEY ENDED.

THE winding of stage-horns, and the bustling of hostlers in the yard below her window, roused the young traveller soon after sunrise. She had hardly completed her hasty toilet, when the waiter summoned her to the breakfast-table. Her father kindly bade her good-morning, and then was soon absorbed in conversation with his late companions.

The lumbering stage-coach was at the door, even before the meal was over, but it could wait, and did wait, until the nine inside-passengers were fully equipped in such wrappings as the keen air made absolutely indispensable.

Belle felt grateful, when her father drew her shawl more closely round her, after she was seated, and then placed at her feet a hot brick, which he had thoughtfully provided for her

comfort. These little acts of attention, trifling as they were, aroused, for the first time, a feeling of real regret that she should have offended so kind and affectionate a parent.

For another long day nine human beings were shut up together. Shaken and tossed, rocked and tumbled, as they drove over the rough road, until all reserve and stiffness were banished, even from the primmest of the company.

In the various joltings Belle had thrust her elbows unmercifully into a fat country-woman next her, and, by way of making amends for this involuntary attack, she had offered to share the contrivance for warming her feet, which had kept her so comfortable. This little politeness opened the way for an acquaintance, which ripened with wonderful rapidity. Belle soon felt familiar with "our folks at home"—the constant theme of the honest woman's conversation.

"The children," Belle already knew by name, but as to the individual who was so affectionately and respectfully referred to as

"*he*" she was left in doubt. This ambiguity was in a measure done away with, when the coach suddenly stopped before a lane leading to a comfortable farm-house, nestled far away on a hill-side.

"This *aint* no wher'—what are we stoppin' for?" exclaimed a countryman, who was on the middle seat.

Belle's stout acquaintance made an impulsive jerk forward, and laid her hand so expressively on the broad strap that shut her in, that the countryman understood her meaning, and let her out as soon as possible.

"There *he* is! I do declare, and all the children, too!" exclaimed the good woman as a stalwart farmer came up to give her a hearty welcome. A large covered wagon, which had been but a moment before filled with a joyous group, was emptied in a moment.

"Mother! mother!" was repeated from mouth to mouth, as lips were put up to be kissed, and warm greetings were exchanged on all sides.

"Mother"—that sound sent a pang to the

heart of Belle, it was spoken with such true affection, such tender respect. When might she speak that word? How great was to be the distance that would separate her from the mother she had so little valued? These questions were occupying the mind of the young girl, when they were not very agreeably echoed from without, by the slender, eager-looking old woman who was now at her side.

"I spose you'll be gettin' out soon, eh?" was interrogatively urged on Belle's attention; but she affected to be watching the party establishing themselves in the great covered wagon.

"Where are you going, miss?" persisted the questioner. "I stop ten miles above, at Allen-ville. You aint goin' there, I take it?"

Belle was truthful and frank, and her impulse was to say at once, "I don't know where I am going," but shame checked her, and crimsoned her expressive face.

Her father saw her embarrassment, and said promptly, "We are going to Sanders, only two miles further on."

At these words Belle's heart throbbed with strong feelings. "Sanders!" She had never even heard of the place. "What was it like? To whose house was she going?"

A boarding-school suggested itself to her mind, and that this was her destination she fully concluded.

Belle was fond of young companions, and the idea of being among girls of her own age was rather pleasing, even under her present disagreeable circumstances.

When the stage-coach made its next stop, her inquiring look towards her father was answered by a nod of assent, and she prepared to alight.

She looked about her for some great building, with a staring announcement of "Young Ladies' Seminary," or "Female Institute," posted in a conspicuous place. No female seminary, no house of any kind was in sight, but a narrow cross-road wound away around a hill, and seemed, by its freedom from the deep ruts of the main road, to be but little used.

Belle heard her father say, "Carry the

trunk on to Sanders ; it will be sent for." Then, taking up their travelling bags, he started forward on the cross-road, desiring her to do the same.

In silence they walked on together. Belle longed to speak, but there was something in her father's sad and somewhat stern expression that seemed to paralyze her tongue. Though that member was quiet, her eyes were doing double duty, looking eagerly, on all sides, for some trace of the point towards which they were tending.

After a long walk, a sudden turn in the road brought them in sight of a small frame house, with a long brick wing, and a porch large enough to have accommodated a patriarchal family. The house stood in a large yard, dotted with fruit trees, through which a wide pavement made a straight line from the gate to the door-step.

In no very enviable frame of mind, Belle followed her father until he stopped in the porch, and made the shining knocker announce their arrival. The door was opened

by an old man, with his hat on, who looked at the strangers with every mark of astonishment.

"Is Miss Hansy at home?" asked Mr. Cortlandt. The old man had not time to answer before Mr. Cortlandt stepped forward, saying, "There she is!" and then advanced to shake hands with the person in question.

Miss Hansy's tall, slender figure was enveloped in a dark brown dress, and a simple muslin cap was on her head. Belle did not observe her dress; at first sight she could only notice the strange contrast between the clear, wide-open, hazel eye that beamed on one side of her face with gentle sweetness, and the tightly closed lid on the opposite side.

Miss Hansy smiled, and looked surprise and welcome with her one eye, as she heartily shook Mr. Cortlandt's offered hand, and exclaimed, "Why, Harry Cortlandt! I did not expect to see thee here! This must be thy daughter. She shows her father in every feature."

"It is my only daughter," said Mr. Cort-

landt, soberly, "and after I have had a little talk with you, you shall make her acquaintance."

"She must go up-stairs and lay off her things," said Miss Hansy. "She will find a fire in the spare room, as the doctor was here to-day from the city." So saying, Miss Hansy led the way to a bedroom in the front of the house, and there left Belle to herself.

"Who is Miss Hansy? Where am I?" thought Belle, as she looked round the small room into which she had been ushered. Every thing in it was scrupulously neat, but there was a plain and strangely old-fashioned air to all the furniture. The white-curtained bed was so high that a pair of steps had been placed beside it to make it accessible. The mahogany dressing bureau was dark with age, though the brass lions' faces, that had held the rings to the drawers for so many years, were as bright as if they had been fastened on the day before. Belle could hear the hay, strewed under the carpet, rustle at every step, as she moved about to survey the premises.

"Where am I?" she again questioned. There was no stir of boarding-school life in the quiet house; no ringing of bells and chorus of young voices. The old man, who opened the door, had looked as much surprised to see them as if he had been a hermit disturbed in his cell.

Belle had time enough to wonder and ask herself questions, to which she could find no satisfactory answer. More than an hour had passed in this manner when there was a slow, uncertain footstep in the hall without, and a knock at the door. Amos, the old man who had acted as porter, appeared, as Belle answered the knock, with his arm stretched out at full length, holding a small tray, on which were a cup of tea, some sandwiches, and a candle.

"She sends good-night to the young lady, and says she better go to bed early," said the old man, and then disappeared. There was a choking in Belle's throat, as she understood that she was to be left to her loneliness, and she put the tray down on the table, and

turned towards the fire. The young traveler had had a long fatiguing ride since dinner, and the white bread looked very tempting. After a few moments of painful thought, Belle, half reluctantly, drew towards the small round table, and began her simple meal. At the taste of the food, her healthy, natural appetite returned, and tea and sandwiches disappeared before her in a way that would have shocked a sentimental miss.

Belle was of a cheerful, lively, natural disposition, and although she felt her father's altered manner, and was most anxious to know something of her present abode, she looked about her, after supper, in quite a pleasant mood. "I wish I had a book to read," she said to herself, as she took a seat on a low chair beside the fire.

She had hardly been seated a moment when there was a greater stumbling in the hall than before, and then the broad-shouldered old man again appeared, laden this time with Belle's trunk, which he deposited in silence, and then, taking up the tray, left her again to herself.

The key was in the lock, and Belle was glad to have the occupation of looking over the contents of the trunk, and drawing from them some inference as to the life in store for her. An ample supply of clothing had been placed there, by whose hand she could not doubt. She knew her mother's care for her comfort, shown at every moment of unpacking. Of the little articles for the toilet, not one was missing. There, too, were her slippers and her wrapper, and there were many little keepsakes, which it had been her pleasure to see about her room at home. There was her favorite desk, newly furnished with a store of writing materials, and there she found a new Bible and Prayer-book, the only books the trunk contained.

Belle took up the former, and opened it. On the fly-leaf was quoted the beautiful Collect, "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that my dear child may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and comfort of Thy

Holy Word, she may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which Thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ." This was written in her father's hand, while below her mother had tremblingly traced—"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee, make His face to shine upon thee, and give thee peace for ever more."

Belle closed the book with tears in her eyes,—tears of tenderness towards the mother from whom she was separated,—but not tears of penitence for the long-indulged spirit of disobedience, which had brought about this separation.

She read no words of the Holy Book, she poured forth no real prayer before she laid her head on the pillow, yet she slept soundly, to wake in health; for the Lord is long-suffering and of tender mercy, and for her an earthly father prayed, and a loving mother lifted up her petitions in faith.

CHAPTER IV.

NEW OCCUPATIONS.

THE winter sun was high in the heavens when Belle woke from the long, sound sleep which had followed the fatigues of the day before. A bright fire was burning on the hearth, and a note addressed to her, lay on the small, round table beside her bed. She took it eagerly, and broke it open. She did not need to look at the signature—"Your devoted father"—to know by whom it was written. It began, "My dear daughter: When your eyes fall on this page I shall be far on my homeward journey." "Gone! without one word to me!" said Belle, as she threw the note angrily down. "That is too bad!"

Very different would have been her words if she had seen the face of tenderness with which that father had bent over her in the

gray dawn, while he invoked blessings on his erring child.

Belle was fairly dressed before she again condescended to look at the note whose opening sentence had so excited her indignation.

Strongly and clearly Mr. Cortlandt had expressed his sense of the heinousness of the sin that his daughter had so frequently committed, that she was quite unconscious of the extent to which it had darkened and benumbed her conscience. Tenderly and compassionately he addressed her, as he urged her to begin at once a new and better life, and to profit to the uttermost by the trying discipline to which he felt it necessary she should be subjected.

With fervent wishes for her best good he closed the long note, which he had written with a trembling hand and a beating heart.

Belle felt a vague sense of disgrace at being so addressed by the father she revered, though she had as yet but little idea of the real hatefulness of her fault. "What 'discipline' does he mean?" she questioned; but imagination returned only the wildest answers. Belle re-

solved to meet boldly whatever might be in store for her, and to put the best possible face on the matter. In this mood she went down stairs, and, notwithstanding her resolution, pushed open, somewhat timidly, the first door to which she came.

No stern judge, no place of punishment, was revealed to her view; not even Miss Hansy's one eye looked reproachfully upon her. She stood alone in a small dining-room, where silence would have reigned, but for the noisy singing of a tea-kettle, perched on the old-fashioned ten-plate stove. The breakfast-table was set for a single person, and the simple fare was all ready, excepting the fresh eggs, which stood prepared to have the boiling water poured upon them.

Belle sat down for a few moments in silence, expecting some one to appear, to let her know if these preparations had been made for her. No one came; she began to move about the room, that it might be known that she was stirring. All was quiet through the house, no one seemed even to breathe in the deep still-

ness. Belle looked out at the side window. The long brick wing (its windows shaded by a high lattice, for a grape vine) stretched off to the right, but not a murmur came through its closed shutters, though the thin column of smoke, that rose from one of its chimneys, gave signs of its being inhabited.

After waiting in doubtful and dreary loneliness for what seemed an hour, at least, Belle's appetite overcame her scruples. She took the biscuit from their warm retreat in the open oven, and, boiling the eggs to her taste, made the tea according to her own notions, and sat down to her solitary breakfast.

There was nothing frightful in that quiet room, but Belle felt the silence oppressive, and would have been glad to hear even a rat busy in the walls.

Silent and solitary as was that morning meal, it was not more so than were the weary hours that followed it. Belle wandered about, no one asking her whither she was going. She ventured to peep into the small

parlor; all there was neat, and simple, but the room was cold and dark, and displayed no indications of being either occupied or visited. Not a book was any where to be seen, not a picture hung upon the walls, to indicate the taste or pursuits of the inhabitants, if inhabitants there were, to this noiseless home. Belle almost began to think Miss Hansy, with her one eye, and stumbling old Amos, were but phantoms of her disordered fancy.

“What do I generally do at home?” thought Belle to herself, as she mentally reviewed one of her ordinary days and its occupations. The review was neither very satisfactory, nor suggestive of expedients for her present diversion. Belle had been much in the habit of idling about, watching her mother’s busy fingers, or chatting with Willy. Her school-books had claimed but a small share of her attention, for she was more ambitious of being a favorite among the scholars, than of winning the approbation of the teacher.

The unconscious idleness, which had been so agreeable when in pleasant company, Belle soon found burdensome, with no other resource than her own thoughts, which were by no means pleasing, when allowed to follow their own bent.

The stumbling step of the old man was a welcome sound to Belle when the morning had almost worn away, and she was glad to hear his voice, though it was neither refined, nor melodious.

"Miss," said he, "she says you may see to your room, and you'll find the bureau drawers empty for you. She says you'll find things ready for you to clear up in there, too," and he pointed to the dining room.

Belle mechanically went up-stairs to "see to her room," and she found it looking truly as if it needed some attention. The bed was unmade, the contents of the trunk were scattered in all directions, and, indeed, every article in the room seemed in the wrong place, save the heavy dressing bureau, which

stood a monument of stability in the midst of the confusion.

Mrs. Cortlandt was one of those busy, unselfish persons who promote just the opposite qualities in those by whom they are surrounded.

The indulgent mother had met Belle's heedlessness by her own care, and had ever ready for her, the apology, "girls at school cannot be expected to have much time to spare for home duties."

Belle felt a sense of discomfort and half-despair as she looked at the scene of disorder before her. It was not the first time that she had left such a room in the morning; but that was quite a different thing from returning to it in the clear light of the noon-day sun. No thoughtful mother had now brought chaos back to order, no neat chamber-maid had laid the bed as with line and plummet, and put aside the incongruous articles that clustered about the looking-glass.

Hopeless as seemed the task, Belle was

really glad to have something to do, and she set to work, in her own way, to produce a change. The bureau-drawers were soon filled with a variety of articles jumbled together, without regard to any of the ordinary rules of classification, and the remaining garments were promiscuously thrust into the trunk. This was the result of but a few moments of active exertion, and then Belle looked around her with no little satisfaction.

The bed was next attacked, and Belle found it quite a relief to her feelings to box and shake unmercifully the huge mass of feathers, with which custom, in those days, made it necessary to fill the "spare-room bed." When this branch of her new occupation was completed, it must be confessed that the surface of the bed, was (as the geographers say) "gently undulating," but that was a small matter so the thing was done. Quite in a glow with her recent exercise, Belle descended to the dining-room. The neat little tub with its mop and towels

near, which she had before observed on the side-table, seemed now to speak directly to her, and she forthwith made the still-singing kettle provide the hot water for her new duties.

Belle was just congratulating herself on her success when, by some awkward chance, she dropped the small, old-fashioned tea-cup, and in a moment it was dashed to pieces.

At this instant Miss Hansy came in at a side door.

Belle's confusion was extreme.

"Thee need not trouble thyself about *that*, child," said a clear, low voice; "there is no sin in such an accident."

"I know I am very careless," said Belle ingenuously, as she looked directly into Miss Hansy's single eye.

"Then thee will try to mend. If thee knows thy faults, thee will not stop there, I hope. I am sorry thee must be left so much to thyself, and will have to do so many things that are strange to thy hands. I can but give thee the home thy father

wishes, for the sake of old times, and thee must make the best of it."

Belle looked inquiringly into Miss Hansy's face, for she longed to know whether her father, in placing her with Miss Hansy, had explained the cause and manner of her leaving home; but in the calm eye, and quiet face, there was no answer to be read.

Even while she had been speaking, Miss Hansy had been placing the simple tea equipage in the small corner-cupboard, and now nearly all traces of it had disappeared, and the remaining articles on the tray were put through a slide in the wall, and then all was in order.

Belle was making up her mind to say something, she hardly knew what, when Miss Hansy again disappeared, and the young stranger was once more alone.

The small dining-room seemed dreary, and Belle betook herself to her quiet bed-room, with a sad feeling, that that was already her home.

Miss Hansy's peculiar use of "thee" was

new to Belle, and not at all in accordance with her preconceived ideas of the way of speaking the "plain language," but she did not feel at all inclined to find fault with any thing about her new acquaintance. If Miss Hansy had had two eyes, Belle might have looked upon her in an unfriendly light, as her jailer in this strange abode; but Belle had one of those natures that are softened and disarmed by a personal misfortune, and the appearance of that sad, closed lid went right to her heart.

Strange as it may seem, Belle was really affectionate and warm-hearted, and deeply attached to her friends. The wild feeling of insubordination and opposition to her mother which had of late been so painfully prominent, was rather a bad habit, carelessly indulged, than a deep-seated determination to pain and try that affectionate parent.

Once more in her own room, Belle, from very listlessness, took up her Prayer-book, and began to look over the various services, some of which she had never read. This she found

a dull business, and she was glad when the sound of a small bell gave promise of the dinner hour's having arrived.

The lunch of cold ham and bread was not very attractive, but she lingered over it as long as possible, and then put together the dishes, and ventured herself to thrust them through the slide, into the large pantry, to which it formed a communication.

That weary day was over at last, and Belle lay down to sleep more sad and subdued than she had ever been in her life.

How cheerful seemed, in remembrance, the fireside at home! How lovely looked her mother's face! How welcome even Willy's teasing, rather than the dreary monotony, the unvaried loneliness of the day she had passed!

"I wonder if they have missed me?" she thought; and she vainly tried to remember some office of kindness, unperformed, by which her mother would be reminded of her absence; some pleasure that would seem less to Willy by not sharing it with her.

The conviction was painfully forced upon

her, that her face might be missed at the fire-side, but that no kindly actions of late, no efforts for others had made her place at home one that could not well be left vacant.

Alas! for those who by idleness and self-indulgence cut themselves off from the sweet household sympathies of those who "bear one another's burdens," and "rejoice with them that rejoice!"

"I wonder how long I am to stay in this dreary place?" thought Belle, as she laid her head on her pillow. "Life would be a burden here. I wish I *could* be sick all by myself, and then how sorry father would feel to think he left me here alone!" she said aloud.

"And how would thee feel if that sickness should be unto death?" said a voice in the room, as Miss Hansy entered.

Belle could not reply, and Miss Hansy continued: "I came to bid thee good-night, and did not willingly hear thy wild wish. God help thee, child, to come to a better mind! Thou art never alone; perhaps in this quiet home thou mayest learn to enjoy His presence

who is about thy bed ; who knoweth thy lying down and thy rising up, and is acquainted with all thy ways."

So saying, Miss Hansy concluded, and to Belle's astonishment, she stooped down and kissed the flushed cheek of the young girl, and then left the room.

"About my bed, and knoweth all my ways," thought Belle. Rather would she have had the oppressive loneliness of the day, than the strange sense of a spiritual presence that had been thus suddenly forced upon her by Miss Hansy's earnest words.

The truth that God is every where, she had been taught from her childhood ; but now, for the first time, she really believed it, and the strange awe that accompanied that belief long banished sleep from her eyes, but at last nature triumphed, and she was lost in dreams.

CHAPTER V.

THE WING.

THE new sense of spiritual things, that had come over Belle in the darkness of night, vanished with the return of day. In the clear light, which brought every material object about her so plainly before her eyes, she no longer realized the invisible presence which had so oppressed her the evening before.

Another day of loneliness, only cheered by occasional glimpses of Miss Hansy, passed slowly away. Home-sickness, in all its strength, came over the solitary girl, and she sat down and cried heartily, in bitterness of spirit. Once she took out her writing materials to commence a letter, imploring to be allowed to return, and promising perfect and cheerful obedience, but her pride revolted at such a submission to authority, and she half-reluctantly threw aside

the sheet she had taken up. Her heart yearned towards her mother, and she felt sure if she could only see that sweet face, she could easily beg forgiveness for her fault, but she could not write down her acknowledgment,—actually put it on paper,—where Willy might see it, or any casual eye might fall upon it.

This idea given up, Belle resolved to try her needle as a comforter. She had never been fond of any kind of plain sewing, and the various bits of fancy work she had commenced had not been placed in her trunk. She took up one of the pocket-handkerchiefs to hem, which she found with her working materials, and sat down, after her solitary tea, to pass her evening in sewing. After sitting at the round table for a time quite industriously, she fancied that it would seem more home-like and cosy if the shutters were closed, and the clear moonlight excluded. She rose suddenly to carry out this idea, and in doing so, she knocked her thimble from her finger, and saw it roll slowly down the gentle slope of the roof of the porch, and lodge in the leaden trough.

This thimble was a special favorite with Belle, being a gold one, and, moreover, a late birthday gift from her mother. The thought of losing it was not for a moment to be tolerated, and Belle did not hesitate to step upon the roof, and move slowly towards the spot where it was lying. She had nearly reached it, when her attention was attracted by a stream of light, that poured from a window in the wing, towards which she had looked so wonderingly, and in which Miss Hansy seemed to spend her time.

From her elevated position Belle could see distinctly into the room, whence the light came, and the scene that caught her eye arrested her attention and chained her to the spot where she stood.

Seated in a huge arm-chair was an old man, apparently past sixty years of age. His powerfully-moulded features had a harsh and disagreeable expression, while round his half-open mouth, there was a look of childish imbecility. One of his legs was stretched out upon a chair, and was closely bandaged.

These bandages Miss Hansy was endeavoring to arrange, while Amos stood by, with his hat, as usual, on his head. Miss Hansy was kneeling, and there was tenderness and gentle care in the very expression of her figure, as she went on with her task.

Even her skilful fingers seemed to be unable to perform this task to the satisfaction of the sufferer. He suddenly gave an impatient jerk, and raising his arm hastily, strove to deal a blow at his nurse. Miss Hansy saw his intention, and quietly moved aside, while the raised arm dropped powerlessly. The expression that came over the face of the sick man, at this failure, was so full of helpless rage, that Belle turned horror-stricken from the sight, but not too soon to catch a glimpse of Miss Hansy's calm, compassionate look, as she met that angry glance.

Belle had well-nigh forgotten her dangerous position in her eagerness to escape from witnessing any more of the secret proceedings in the wing.

She started, as she found herself stumbling

on the very verge of the roof, and remembered at once the object that had brought her into the cool night air. Shivering with cold and agitation, she secured her thimble and crept back to her room, with new food for thought.

She was no longer in the mood for sewing quietly. After wondering long over the scene she had witnessed, she betook herself to bed.

Belle had not closed her eyes when Miss Hansy entered, in her usual quiet way, to say good-night. Belle looked at her, to see if there were no traces of recent excitement on her face, but all was serene and calm, and her one eye looked forth as kindly as ever.

Miss Hansy was not a little surprised at the glance of affectionate interest which Belle bestowed on her, but being a woman of few words, she asked no questions. "I am glad to see thee has been sewing; the needle is a great blessing; but thee looks tired, and I

must bid thee good-night," said Miss Hansy, turning away.

"Good-night, dear Miss Hansy," said Belle, with involuntary warmth.

"Good-night, child;" was again repeated, and again the unexpected kiss, went to Belle's heart.

CHAPTER VI.

POOR NANNY.

A LONELY week had passed away, and a stormy Sunday, spent at home in lounging and idle dreaming, had made Belle more dissatisfied than ever with her present life.

It was a bright morning in February. Winter seemed to have suddenly melted into spring, quite to the surprise of the dull, brown earth and leafless trees.

Belle was cheered by the pleasant change, and, for the first time since her arrival, she felt inclined to try the fresh air.

As she walked down the wide pavement, she half-expected to hear a voice calling after her, and to learn that she was to be kept a close prisoner in her new home. She hoped Miss Hansy would see her, and know, at least, that she went out boldly,

with no attempt at concealment. But no one observed her, or if so, thought her movements worthy of attention.

Along the hard, brown road Belle walked rapidly, feeling fresh exhilaration at every step in the pure sweet air. She had not wished to tread again the same lane over which she had passed with her father, and had, therefore, started off in an opposite direction. Every thing was new to her, and each object had for her its interest. She had wandered nearly a mile from her present abode, when she overtook a little boy walking slowly along, laden with a heavy basket.

As Belle passed him, at a rapid pace, he looked up at her with a pleasant glance that arrested her attention.

"Let me help you," said she, involuntarily. "That basket seems heavy for you."

"The basket isn't much, if it wasn't for what's in it," said the little boy laughing. "There's two pies, a big loaf of bread, and a heap of apples and potatoes; and they

have a right to weigh powerful hard, as they do."

"Why, you are quite a market man!" said Belle. "It can't be you are taking all that to school for your dinner?"

"No, indeed," said the boy, laughing; "hungrier mouths than mine will eat it all up soon. Do you see that little brown house yonder? That's where I'm going. Don't trouble yourself, miss; I can carry it just that little piece farther."

Belle had taken hold of the basket, and she did not give it up; for though her young companion seemed quite uneasy at the effort she was making, it was very evident that he was weary with his heavy load.

"Mother said I'd be tired, but I wanted to carry it all myself, so that would be my way of helping," said the boy, "and I aint sorry a bit that I tried."

"Your way of helping?" said Belle, inquiringly.

"Yes," answered the boy. "Mother says, children have nothing to give away but just

their own strength, and you know we all ought to do something for the poor."

Belle felt a pang of conscience, as she thought how little she had ever acted on this principle; but she only said, "so it is a poor person that all these nice things are for?"

"Why, of course!" said the boy, with a look of surprise. "And if you just stop with me, you'll see the family need it enough."

They were now at the small gate leading to the brown cottage, to which the boy had pointed. Belle kept hold of the basket, and went determinately on.

At the door the boy gave a decided knock with his knuckles, and almost immediately the upper half of it was opened, and over the remaining half looked out the thin, pale face of a little girl about six years old. "May we come in, Jany?" asked the boy in his cheerful, pleasant way.

"*You* may, for certain," said the child, her face brightening as she spoke, and then she turned a doubtful glance towards Belle.

"Oh, she's a nice young lady, that helped

me along the road with my basket here. You needn't mind her, I'm sure," said the boy. The lower half door was thrown open, and the two put down the heavy basket on the floor of the small room, into which they were ushered.

A young woman, not more than twenty-three years of age, sat, bolstered up in a stiff old-fashioned chair, in front of the fire-place where a few bits of brush and chips were half-smoking, half-blazing on the hearth.

In her arms she held a young infant, that looked even more thin and pallid than the scantily-clothed mother. A child, about three years of age, was amusing himself with stirring lustily the ashes in the chimney-corner, with a bunch of brush.

"Why, Master Johnny, are you here again so soon? Your mother don't forget us," said the woman in a feeble voice.

"She never forgets anybody but her own self," said the boy warmly. "She said she could'nt sleep last night for thinking of you. She put in the basket any thing that came

handy, and she says she'll be down herself this afternoon to see how you are getting on." So saying, the little boy began to unpack the stores in his basket, to the wondering delight of Jany and the younger child, who both willingly lent a hand in the pleasant work.

Belle, meanwhile, had stood a confused and astonished spectator of the scene before her. Her real kindness now prevailed over her embarrassment, and she stepped forward, saying:

"You look weak, ma'am; do you think you are quite able to sit up?"

"Oh yes, miss!" said the woman, with a languid smile; "I hope soon to be able to work, if I can get any thing to do."

"What kind of work can you do?" said Belle, with a vague idea of rendering assistance.

"Well," said the woman, a faint blush tinging her pale cheek, "I was used to farm-work once, and I can sew pretty well. Perhaps you could help me to get work, miss?"

"I wish I could, with all my heart," said Belle, warmly; "but I am away from home, and don't know many people about here." The tears filled Belle's eyes as a sense of her own lonely condition, her empty purse, and her helplessness came over her.

"Don't trouble yourself, miss," said the woman, noticing her expression. "That little boy's mother made acquaintance here yesterday, and she seems like a real old friend, and I'm sure I've had more kindness than I deserve since he went away."

"Where has he gone?" said Belle, with some curiosity.

"It ain't no wonder," said the woman, avoiding a direct answer. "*He* never meant no harm—but my being sick, and the children wantin' every thing, and the taste of the bottle; it just made him wild, and he couldn't stand it here—poor fellow! It was all my fault, our marrying at all; but I never thought it would come to this!" and the poor woman sobbed violently.

"Don't! don't cry!" said Belle, tenderly.

"Perhaps he will come back, when you don't expect him."

"No! no!" said the woman, still sobbing, "he's over the seas, by this time. He was a'most wild with wantin' work, and wantin' every thing, and being ashamed anybody should know how poor off we was, and then the bottle, and all. Poor fellow! he couldn't stand it. It's just what I deserve. Them that goes against their own mothers never comes to good, I've heard say, and now, I knows it's true. I can hear her now, just as if it was yesterday. 'Jane,' says she, 'Jane, he's a good enough boy, Jack Barker is, but you are too young, child. Let him go out to Ameriky first, and get a start, and then he'll come back for you, and that'll be better for all.' I was wild and foolish, and would have my own way against them that cared the most for me. I left my mother and my old father, without a word of good-bye, and ran off with Jack Barker—bad luck to him to have such a wild, young thriftless wife! We never pros-

pered, and why should we? Them that goes against their own mothers never comes to good. It was all my fault, and poor Jack couldn't stand it."

The woman's words had sunk into Belle's heart. Was not she herself "one to whom no good could come?" as the woman had simply expressed it.

"I deserve it all, miss," said the woman with a meek look. "I see now, how wrong I was, and if I could only ask her to forgive me, I shouldn't mind this growin' thin day after day, and a'most coughin' my life away. I know the children will be cared for; they have a better friend than I have, up there. If I could only see her once more, and beg her pardon on my knees. Somehow, it seems to me the gate of Heaven can't open, even for Jesus' sake, to them as turns against their own flesh and blood. Didn't *He* mind His mother when He knew more than all the world? Didn't He lean down from that cruel cross, to care after His mother? What will He say to me, that

never had her blessing since that evil night that I stole away from my home?"

Belle was much overcome, and full of pity for the pale, agitated sufferer ; but no words of comfort came to her lips.

"Don't cry," said the little boy, who had been an eager, but unnoticed listener to what had passed. "Don't cry. I know the Lord Jesus, and He is never hard with anybody. Didn't He take Peter back, when he swore he didn't know Him? Didn't He pray for the wicked men that drove the nails through His hands and feet, and then stood round to see Him die? The Lord Jesus won't let any thing be laid up against you, if your name is written in His big book. I know that's true, for I have heard mother say so, and she can read and explain the good book, a'most the same as a minister. There, don't cry;" and the little fellow put up his tiny pocket-handkerchief to wipe away the tears that coursed down the thin, pale cheek.

"Bless you, child, for your sweet words,"

said the woman, kissing the earnest face turned up towards her. "It seems to me they must be true, they do me so much good here, where it aches so," and she put her hand to her side.

"Now do look bright once before I go," said the little boy, "for I can't stay; I have to get off to school, but I'll come just as often as I can, and mother'll be here this afternoon, and I am sure she can comfort you."

Only half satisfied with the faint smile that the poor woman conjured up, the boy took his basket and prepared to take leave.

"Good-bye," said Belle, putting out her hand towards the sick woman, "good-bye; I wish I could say something to cheer you, but I am a poor, wicked girl myself, and I don't know how to teach anybody else what is right, but I will come and see you again, if you will let me."

Belle's unaffected interest and her frank, kindly manner had made a strong impression, and the poor woman promptly answered, "Oh yes, do come, I shall be so glad to see you again."

When Belle and her little companion were once more on the road, he looked at her somewhat shyly, and seemed inclined to leave a wide space between them, as he walked silently along. At length he burst forth as follows:—

“I thought you were a sweet, kind young lady, but you said you were ‘wicked;’ have you done any *dreadful* thing? Don’t you love the Lord Jesus?”

These were hard questions for Belle to answer, and she would gladly have passed them by, but the face of the anxious questioner was turned towards her, and involuntarily he had stepped to her side, and laid hold of her dress.

“I never killed anybody,” she said, trying to smile. “You need not be afraid of me.”

“I am not afraid of any thing but sin. Mother says, that is all we need be afraid of,” said the little fellow, drawing himself to his full height. “But I thought you were a sweet young lady, and now you don’t say you love the Lord Jesus, and I can’t help feeling badly about it.” So saying, Master Johnny slipped

quickly across the road, and kept sedulously along on the opposite side from Belle, now and then casting at her a wondering, pitying look.

“Here is where I turn to go home, Johnny,” said Belle, who was half-amused, half-pained by his behavior. “Here we part; will you not shake hands with me?”

Somewhat slowly, Johnny put out his hand, and then, as if doubtful whether he had done a good thing, he drew it soon away, and scampered off as fast as his feet could carry him, while Belle pursued her solitary walk, lost in new and solemn reflections.

CHAPTER VII.

A MOTHERLY HEART.

BELLE had been much moved by her first sight of real, uncomplaining poverty. The thin calico dress of the young woman, and the small, worn shawl drawn so closely across her sunken chest, lingered in Belle's memory with painful distinctness. She mentally reviewed her own wardrobe, with a vague desire to part with some of its abundance for the poor sufferer; but each article seemed most inappropriate for that humble home, and were it not so, she felt a doubt as to her right to give away clothing prepared expressly by her mother for her own use. Full of these thoughts, Belle walked up the wide, straight pavement of her new home, without once noticing that Miss Hansy was waiting at the door to receive her.

"Oh, Miss Hansy!" she exclaimed, as she

caught the first glimpse of the sweet, calm face of her hostess, just as she was stumbling over her; "Oh, Miss Hansy! I have seen such a poor, unfortunate woman!" and then followed a description of the family in the little brown house, that moved Miss Hansy almost to tears.

Belle forbore to allude to the woman's self-reproach for the act of disobedience which had separated her from her mother. On that theme she felt disinclined to touch; but on the physical distress she had witnessed she dwelt with the eloquence of real, hearty interest.

"I wonder I have not heard of their being in the neighborhood," said Miss Hansy; "something must be done immediately for the poor things."

"They have only been here a few days," said Belle. "The little boy I spoke of went to see them with his mother for the first time, yesterday afternoon."

"Would thee mind going there again?" asked Miss Hansy doubtfully—adding, "I cannot well leave home."

"Mind it! That is just what I want," said Belle; "but my clothes are not fit to take to the woman, and she does so need something"—and Belle paused and hesitated.

"I have some red flannel just fit to make her a wrapper," said Miss Hansy. "If thee can help me, I think we could finish it to-day."

"I should so like it," said Belle, with more real pleasure than she had felt since she had been an exile from her father's house.

Belle was not lonely that day; very busily she worked on the garment Miss Hansy had cut out, and the thought of doing something herself for the poor woman overcame all difficulties, and made labor seem light.

Although Miss Hansy had the lion's share in the work, yet Belle had not wasted a moment until the time came for her to prepare for the pleasure of taking the garment herself, to which Miss Hansy was putting in the finishing stitches, in her own room.

When Belle was ready to start from the door, she was surprised and a little annoyed to see old Amos ready to accompany her.

Her annoyance passed away in a moment, when Miss Hansy said, "Amos will go with thee to carry the bag. The children must not go hungry."

The bag, which had been hidden by the figure of the stout, old man, was a welcome sight, and Belle doubted not that it contained supplies that would be most acceptable, in spite of the heavily-laden basket that she had helped to carry in the morning.

Amos kept at a respectful distance in the rear, and Belle walked rapidly on, lost in her own meditations. She soon reached the small house, and was about entering in her eagerness, when the sound of voices within made her take her hand from the latch, and knock somewhat hesitatingly at the door.

There was a slight stir within, and before she was admitted she distinctly heard the not unfamiliar tones of a strong but pleasant,

heartly female voice, apparently speaking words of comfort to some one sobbing within.

Jany's little pale face soon appeared above the half-open door, and Belle felt the smile of welcome, with which it greeted her, was well worth having.

"Why, miss! I did not look for you here," said a cheerful voice, and an honest right hand was offered to Belle, while the pleasant face of the country-woman, who had been her fellow-traveller, beamed upon her, bright with agreeable surprise.

Belle shook the offered hand, and, bowing to the invalid, sat down rather awkwardly, while Johnny peered out from behind his mother, looking at Belle a little more favorably than when they had parted in the morning. The warm greeting given by his mother to Belle, seemed to have forced upon him the idea that she might not be altogether unworthy his notice, though so much of a heathen.

That his mother knew quite as much about her as he did, he was sure, for had he not

rehearsed to her faithfully every word of their conversation of the morning, and had she not said in reply, "Poor young thing, may God help her to know the better way!"

Belle's doubt as to how to open the object of her visit was suddenly resolved by decided action on the part of Amos. The door was thrown open, the great bag was dropped on the floor, and at the same time seeming to address himself to the ceiling, he said, "Miss Hansy Ware sends this, with her kind wishes to her new neighbor;" and then he immediately disappeared.

"I am much obliged to Miss Hansy Ware, whoever she may be," said the young woman. "I am not worthy to have such friends raised up to me in my distress. How my poor mother would thank you for your kindness!" and she cast a grateful look towards the country-woman, who had drawn up close to her with a motherly, protective air.

"Miss Hansy thought you might like a wrapper, as you are not very strong to sew for yourself," said Belle, glad to have an

opportunity of using the name of another, as she produced her parcel, and unrolled the comfortable garment.

“How very nice! how thoughtful!” said the poor woman, smiling sorrowfully; “but who is this kind Miss Hansy?”

Belle, in her utter inability to answer this question, turned her eyes inquiringly towards her friend of the stage-coach, as if expecting from her the required reply, and she was not disappointed.

“Miss Hansy Ware is a stranger here herself. Nobody knows her much except our pastor; she never goes out nowhere, and the sarving man she brought along with her—the same as brought the bag there—don’t put up with having questions asked him. It’s like she’s shy about visiting, because of her one eye; but I don’t call that the right sort of feeling; just as if any body would not feel more tender-like towards her for having such a misfortune. They do say she came in a covered wagon in the evening, just on purpose not to be mortified, seeing strangers in the stage-coach, but *he*

says he don't think it's any body's business how she came, and *he's* sure she's all right, for our pastor likes her, and it's a perfect pattern to see her at church, she's so quiet and so solemn-like."

Belle listened with great interest to every word spoken by her broad-faced friend, and would willingly have asked further questions about a subject in which she was so much interested; but a natural sense of delicacy kept her silent.

No such motives influenced the invalid, and she exclaimed, "Poor thing! only one eye! well, that is bad luck. Little wonder she don't like to be seen!"

"She needn't mind showing her face," said Johnny, looking out boldly from behind his mother. "She looks sweeter with her one eye than most folks with two. When I fell on the ice, just by her, two weeks ago Sunday, didn't she pick me up herself, and look at me so kind. I was glad I fell, just to have her turn so kind towards me and say, 'Never thee mind that, my lad; better thee should stumble many times

like that than fall into ever so little a 'sin!' Those were the very words she said."

"Yes, and true words they were, Johnny," said the mother, with a fond, approving glance.

The little face of the boy expressed a serious, silent assent to what his mother had said, and the young woman responded aloud :

"Yes, that's true enough ! It isn't easy taking back what's done, and that's the worst of it. It's no use thinking of what's past. When you've gone wrong once it's all down-hill afterwards," and she placed her hand on her side.

"Don't say that, Nanny," said the stout woman kindly. "The Scripture says 'return,' and that's what every body ought to set about doing who finds themselves on a wrong way."

Nanny fixed her sunken eyes on the face of her visitor, and said earnestly, "Return?—yes, if I only knew how."

Mrs. Tilden (for that was the name of the honest country-woman) drew her chair closer to Nanny's side. Simply and clearly she explained the free offers of pardon and eternal happiness made in the Bible, to all who re-

pent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nanny listened with anxious interest, and eyes full of tears, but not a word escaped her lips.

"May God help you to take His truth to your heart," said Mrs. Tilden, solemnly.

Nanny murmured "Amen," and buried her face in her hands.

Mrs. Tilden quietly rose to take leave, and Belle followed her example. When they were quite ready, they both approached the poor young woman, whose head was still bowed on her knees. Belle could not hear the words of comfort whispered by her companion, but she saw the upraised face suddenly lighted by hope, as she answered:

"Oh, if it could be so! May God bless you for your kindness to a poor unworthy creature!"

"Good-bye, Nanny," said Belle, taking the invalid's hand, kindly. The young girl could not speak words of comfort, but her face, beaming with hearty sympathy, told the interest she felt.

"Thank you, thank you, miss: you are all

very kind. And thank her, too—I mean Miss Hansy, as you call her. The children are provided for now, as long as I shall live, I dare say, and after that—”

“They shall not want friends,” said Mrs. Tilden, finishing the sentence. “The orphans—God is pledged to take care of them. Remember that, Nanny.”

In another moment the door was closed, and Belle stood side by side with Mrs. Tilden in the little yard.

Johnny looked at his mother doubtfully, to see what course she would pursue under these circumstances. As she stepped on with Belle, he seemed to think it possible his principles might not be compromised by keeping her company, and they all three walked on together, for a few moments, in silence.

Johnny was the first to speak. “Oh, mother!” he said, “do you think she will really die?”

“Yes, my child,” said the mother gently, “I do not believe Nanny has many weeks to live; but I hope she will go to the ‘better

country,' where sickness and sorrow never come."

"Oh dear! I wish every body was good," said the little boy, half-crying. "I feel so badly about Nanny, and—a—"

He did not finish, but dropping behind his mother, he rubbed his eyes vigorously with his small pocket-handkerchief, and relapsed into silence.

Belle could not help thinking that her own acknowledged indifference to holy things was one cause of the little fellow's sorrow, and she was touched by his quiet distress.

"Don't feel badly, Johnny," she said, stepping back to his side, and, stooping down to him, she added in a low voice, "I mean to try to be better."

There was real joy in the glance he turned towards her, and an expression of hearty confidence in the way in which he took the hand which she held out to him.

"You seem fond of children," said Mrs. Tilden; "have you brothers and sisters of your own?" It was a common question, but

it brought up to Belle the dear home-circle from which she had been so suddenly expelled, and she could hardly command herself enough to answer.

"I have only one brother, and he is almost as old as I am; but I am very fond of children, though I have never lived in the house with them."

"If you love children, you must come to our house; we have plenty there. It is only a pretty little walk from Miss Hansy's, when you take the lane where we turn off. Won't you come?"

"I should like to, very much," said Belle, heartily.

"You can't mistake the road. Follow this lane until you come to the big gate at the end, and then you are at our farm, where we shall always be happy to see you," said Mrs. Tilden, as she came at that moment to the cross-road which Johnny had before taken.

Pleasant words of parting were exchanged, and then Belle loosed the hand of her little companion, and walked on alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOLEMN LESSONS.

It was Sunday morning. Belle had risen full of good resolutions, and impatient to begin upon the thorough reform she meant to commence in her heart and life. She had made up her mind to read a little in her Bible every day, and had taken up the holy book for the purpose. She could not decide where to begin, and was turning over the leaves doubtfully, when there was a gentle knock at the door.

Belle looked annoyed at the interruption, and rose, somewhat impatiently, to open the door. Miss Hansy's kind "good-morning" banished this feeling, and Belle was glad to see her sit down, as if she had something to say.

"Would thee like to go to church this morning?" asked Miss Hansy.

"Yes, indeed! Are you going?" said Belle, eagerly.

"I can not go," said Miss Hansy, soberly; "but Amos will show thee the way, if thee would like it. Thee must be ready to start by half-past nine. I shall not see thee again before that time. May the blessing of the Lord find thee on His own day!" Having uttered these last words with the earnestness of a prayer, Miss Hansy gave Belle one of her unexpected kisses, and went out quickly.

Belle did not again take up her Bible, for her mind was filled with new topics of thought, and she forgot the occupation in which she had been interrupted by Miss Hansy's visit.

"Was she going to a Quaker meeting? How long was the walk? What should she wear? Why could not Miss Hansy go?" These questions, and many others, filled the mind of Belle, while she took her solitary breakfast and prepared for church.

At the appointed hour, Amos was in attendance—hat on, and stick in hand. Acting as

guide, he stepped on before Belle, passed the lane that led to Tilden farm, and went steadily forward until he came to the humble home of poor Nanny. Here, to Belle's astonishment, he turned, and before she could speak to him, for she was at some distance behind him, he entered the house.

When she came up to the little gate, he was there again, and ready to go on before her.

"How is Nanny this morning?" asked Belle, impatiently.

"She thanks Miss Ware, and is more comfortable."

These words Amos seemed to let unwillingly out of his mouth, and made amends for their utterance by unbroken silence during the rest of their walk. He kept himself out of the way of further questions by walking at such a rapid pace as to leave Belle constantly some yards in the rear.

Belle soon had enough to occupy her attention, for she found herself drawing near the little village of Sanders.

A few neat white houses, with gardens

about them, were clustered near a post-office and a blacksmith's shop, while a little apart, with its grass-grown cemetery around it, stood the village church. A cheerful bell was giving out its call to prayer, and the worshippers were already gathering.

Amos walked up the steps, and up the middle alley to the second pew, and threw open the door without once looking behind him.

Belle mechanically took her seat, and then glanced timidly around her. That glance brought a flush of pleasure to her cheek, for it convinced her that she was at home, where she could worship God "after the manner of her fathers."

Kneeling down, she repeated a short prayer, in which she asked that the services might be blessed to her, and that she might not give way to wandering thoughts, or suffer mere worship of the lips to take the place of true devotion of the heart. These words she had spoken from Sunday to Sunday, since in childhood her mother had taught them to her, but now there was much real earnestness in her

petitions. She had begun to desire those spiritual blessings, to which she felt she was a stranger.

From distant farms and humble way-side homes the worshippers slowly gathered. Belle watched them coming in, and felt a sense of loneliness stealing over her, as strange faces began to look out from the seats about her. A large square pew near her was still vacant; but even its ample dimensions seemed hardly capacious enough to hold the family that now entered the church. Father and mother, stout and comely, were followed by children of all sizes, from the brown-cheeked son, able to handle the plough, to the rosy two-year old child in his father's arms.

Belle felt a smile of recognition pass over her face as she perceived Mrs. Tilden and Johnny in the little group, though quite unobserved by them.

The children were soon ranged in orderly rows, and then Belle could not help noticing one pale, sorrow-marked little face in the midst of the glowing health and cheerfulness around.

Yes; she was not mistaken—she had seen those sad eyes, and those thin cheeks. Even in her new and comfortable clothes, Belle recognized Nanny's little Jany, in the midst of Mrs. Tilden's own bright group. Belle had been so busy watching her friends in the square pew that she had not observed that the clergyman had entered the chancel. The congregation suddenly rose, and a deep voice uttered the words—"I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son."

The words thrilled through the heart of Belle, as if she alone had been addressed; and conscience whispered of repentance and return to her earthly father, and suggested the thought of a heavenly parent offended and forsaken.

The clergyman was no stranger to Belle. That silver hair, that calm and loving face she had watched through those weary days in the stage coach, and had learned from them a lesson not soon to be forgotten. She could not fail to recognize the venerable stranger in

whose conversation her father had found such a charm. A long, long time it seemed to Belle, since that first day of leaving home, now that she looked back to it, and she felt that some change had taken place in her, since, cold and proud, she rode, mile after mile, in silence. She felt almost as if the clergyman must have recognized her and known something of her circumstances, so directly addressed to her seemed the earnest words with which he opened the service: "I will arise and go to my Father." With the exhortation she had been familiar since her childhood, but now it fell on her ears with new force; she felt herself particularly urged to make a confession of the sins of her youth, and to seek forgiveness where only it could be found.

In a voice too low for human ears, Belle breathed the words of the confession, in sincerity and truth, and when the absolution was pronounced, the minister seemed to her a messenger sent of God, to declare unto her pardon and peace.

With a solemn consciousness of the presence

of the Lord to whom she had really spoken, Belle rose from her knees. She joined in the chants and listened with attention during the lessons; but when once more in the attitude of prayer, her mind wandered far away from the holy thoughts with which it should have been occupied, and it was not until the text was given out, that she once more realized the presence of God in His own temple, and the unworthiness of such a worshipper as herself.

“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,” said the earnest voice of the clergyman. These faithful words of Scripture he so brought home to his congregation, that many a head was bowed in shame, and many an eye full of tears. For the first time in her life, Belle had a faint idea of the sinfulness of her own heart, and the deep rebellion of her past life.

The tender mercy and loving kindness of the God against whom the human soul opposes itself, to its own destruction, were dwelt upon by the earnest speaker, till Belle was

overwhelmed with shame and contrition, at the base ingratitude which she had shown to such a heavenly Father—such a Saviour. No one watched the changing expressions as they were marked on her uplifted face, no one read the secret of her heart, save the Eye which beholds but to pity, and chastens but to save.

Yet Belle's presence at church had not escaped the notice of the pastor, and he took pains to give her a welcome among the members of his flock. His voice sounded kindly in her ear as she was passing through the porch, and his hand was outstretched, as he said, "Miss Cortlandt, I believe. I am glad to have you under my peculiar care, and I shall not forget that you belong to me. I should have called upon you at Miss Ware's long ere this, had I not been suddenly summoned from home the day after we parted in the stage-coach."

Meanwhile, old Amos stood by, evidently quite ready to be moving, yet not unwilling to claim some small share of the clergyman's attention.

"Well, Amos, you are as regular as the church bell," said the old gentleman. "I should hardly know, now, what to think of a Sunday when you were not here. Present my particular regards to Miss Ware, and tell her I have been away from home a couple of weeks, but shall try and see her to-morrow."

"Miss Hansy will be most partikler glad to see Mr. Heber," said Amos, with a significant look. "Things haven't gone just right," and having added this remark, his mouth shut suddenly, as if he feared that he had said too much.

Belle had food enough for thought during her solitary walk homeward. Most unworthy she felt to share even the common mercies showered so abundantly by her heavenly Father. The sunshine and the clear, bracing air seemed more than she deserved, after so many years of thanklessness and rebellion.

Belle was walking slowly and unconsciously past the cottage of poor Nanny, when she was suddenly arrested by loud cries of "Stop! stop, miss! Mother! mother! Come! come!"

In a moment Belle was at the bedside of Nanny. She found her lying faint and panting, while Jany, in her neat Sunday attire, was vainly trying to bring back some color to her cheeks—some signs of life and interest in what was going on around her.

Belle was inexperienced in the sick-room, but there was a pallor in the face of poor Nanny, and a strange, unnatural sound in her breathing, that forced home the fearful truth that she was dying.

Belle placed her arm under the head of the poor woman, and strove to raise it. As she sat upon the low bed, supporting the sufferer, she heard her murmur a few broken words, with the earnestness of one who will soon cease to be heard on earth.

"Tell *her*—my mother—Nanny never saw a happy day after she left her home. Tell her, forgive! forgive! If I could only hear her say, 'never mind, child; it's all over now.' Tell *him* there's a world where Jesus takes in the poor and sorrowful, as well as the rich, if they will trust. Tell *him* to trust in Jesus!"

These words Nanny had spoken unfalteringly, though almost in a whisper, but now her weak voice trembled, and her eyes, so soon to close in death, filled with tears as she looked at her little ones, and said, "God help the children! They'll miss their mother, poor and wicked as she has been; but they'll never suffer what I have, goin' against the wishes of the mother that held me on her knee. That's a comfort to think of. God help the poor things! There, don't cry, Jany. Mother's goin' to the Lord Jesus. Poor and wicked as she has been, Jesus will wash her and make her fit for heaven. Good-bye, Jany. Raise up little Jack, and let me see him once more."

The mother tenderly kissed the wondering child, and then strove to turn and take to her breast the helpless babe that lay at her side, but she was not equal to the effort.

"No! I can't leave the poor things here, alone; I can't leave my poor babies!" she exclaimed.

"God will take care of them, Nanny," said Belle, much overcome.

"Yes; I leave my little ones to God. I go to sit low down in heaven, let in for Jesus' sake! for Jesus' sake—Jesus' sake!" murmured the poor woman, in a voice still fainter and fainter.

Belle waited to hear again that earnest whisper "for Jesus' sake;" but the voice which had spoken was silent in death—the soul had gone to its account.

Even the children were awed into perfect stillness, as they looked for a moment on the rigid face of their mother; then rose a cry of distress, such as only comes when childhood feels the strong grief of an older heart.

Little Jany flung herself on the bed, beside her mother, and screamed in her bitter distress, while Jack joined his baby lamentations for a loss he as yet could little understand. Belle strove in vain to comfort the children; at length she said desperately, "Where is Mrs. Tilden?"

"She rode away, and took Lucy—the girl who staid here this morning—too. O, I wish they were here!"

Amos had made sure of Mrs. Tilden's presence where he saw she was so much needed, by starting on briskly after the great wagon, which he saw, in the distance, turning down the lane that led to Tilden farm. His loud calls sounded out on the Sunday stillness, and soon brought little Johnny's indignant face to the rear of the wagon, where he would have administered a rebuke if old Amos had been within hearing of his young voice.

"Making such a noise, Sunday! It's a shame, indeed!" said Johnny. "It's a shame, mother, and I hope you'll tell him so."

Mrs. Tilden spoke quickly, but it was to utter no word of blame. "Turn, husband, turn quickly! There must be something wrong to bring Amos at such a pace." The long wagon was soon at Amos's side.

"She's a dying, the woman there is!" said Amos, then wheeling round, he started off for Miss Ware's at the same rapid pace as before.

Mrs. Tilden soon stood beside the bed where Nanny was lying cold and stiff in death. Susan, the girl who had been entrust-

ed with the care of Nanny during the morning, followed wild with fright and astonishment.

"She did sit up uncommon, only an hour ago, *Miss Tilden*, as I told you! I don't see what's took her!" said she.

"Silence, Susan!" said Mrs. Tilden solemnly, as she drew the weeping children to her side, and then with her arm round each of them, she knelt beside their mother. Belle followed her example. Mrs. Tilden spoke to the God, into whose keeping the soul of the mother had passed, and besought Him to watch over with peculiar care the motherless little ones, now left to the charge of strangers. She asked that all present might be made "deeply sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of human life," and so live as not to fail of a final entrance into the kingdom above.

Deeply solemnized, Belle joined heartily in this earnest prayer, and, for the first time in her life, fully realized that she, too, must soon lie down in death.

Jany and little Jack clung to Mrs. Tilden

as if she had some strange power to comfort them. She led them gently from the room, and placed them in the great wagon among her own rosy children, who looked with wonder and pity at their swollen, sorrowful faces.

"Don't cry, please don't," said Johnny, producing his own ever-ready pocket-handkerchief. "Don't cry, and I'll tell you about Jesus."

"Jesus," said Jany, looking up, "that's where mother said she was going."

Johnny forbore expressing any pious horror at her mistake, and drawing close to her side, he began to talk in his own little earnest way, about the Saviour whom he had learned to love.

Mrs. Tilden slipped away, and in a few moments returned with the poor, weak baby in her motherly arms.

"Husband," said she, "you must take the poor wee thing home yourself. You've a tender hand for the little ones, bless you!"

The sturdy farmer reached down from his

seat, and took the infant gently in his arms, while tears stood in his brown eyes.

"Poor baby!" he said, as he wrapped her in his heavy overcoat, and buttoned her next to his heart. "God do so to me, as I stand friend to this one!" he murmured, and then dashing away his tears, he gathered up the reins, much to the relief of the strong and restive horses, and drove off towards the farm.

"This is no place for the young lady," said Mrs. Tilden, turning to Belle. "Susan and I can do all that is necessary. Some one will do the same for us one day."

"I should like to help you," said Belle, quietly.

"Miss Hansy Ware, no doubt, will give you a way to help us at home," said Mrs. Tilden. "You had better go on now, child. May what you have seen be blessed to you! Good-bye, dear."

Miss Hansy did provide work for Belle, on which she sewed with many solemn, prayerful thoughts.

Belle earnestly desired to be "led into all truth," and the God who orders every circumstance of our lives, was opening her eyes to see the way which leadeth unto eternal life.

CHAPTER IX.

LETTERS.

THE remains of poor Nanny had been laid in the village church-yard, and her helpless family had been welcomed to the plenty and cheerfulness of Tilden farm.

Nanny had passed from the weary scenes of earth to the eternal home, which she humbly entered "for Jesus' sake."

Meanwhile the soul of Belle had passed through a change as important, and over which, perchance, there was equal joy in heaven.

The sheet of paper which she had so often drawn out to write a confession of her fault, was no longer kept blank by pride and an evil heart. It had been covered with words of deep penitence and humble petitions for

pardon, and was now far on its way to her distant home.

It had cost Mrs. Cortlandt a severe struggle to suffer quietly the separation from her daughter, which her husband had deemed necessary. Full of love and forgiveness for the absent one, she longed for her at her side, and about her daily walk.

Mr. Cortlandt, though not less affectionate, was of a more determined spirit, and he was resolved to leave Belle where he knew her to be surrounded by influences calculated to produce the right effect upon her, while he, at the family altar and in the closet, ceased not to implore the divine blessing on his dear, but erring child.

Day after day had passed away, and yet no letter had arrived from Belle, though Miss Hansy forwarded frequent accounts of her welfare, and expressed her growing attachment to her young charge.

"A letter from Belle!" shouted Willy, triumphantly, one morning, as he entered the breakfast room. "A letter from Belle!

I should know her Ms and Cs in Australia." Mr. Cortlandt tore open the envelope, while his wife bent over him.

Devout thankfulness filled the hearts of the parents, as they read, not only expressions of deep regret for disrespect and disobedience to them, but a hearty acknowledgment of sin against God, and an humble hope of forgiveness through the blood of Christ.

Willy saw with astonishment their deep emotion, for he was ignorant even of the cause of his sister's sudden departure from home. The whole was explained to him when the little family knelt together that morning, and the Lord above was thanked for the penitent child, not only brought home in heart to her earthly parents, but made, in truth, to draw near to her Father in heaven.

Belle had not long to wait for a reply to the letter which had cost her so many tears. It came, full of love, pardon and encouragement. Three precious sheets—the advice she needed from her father, the outpouring of her mother's tender sympathising heart, and

a note from Willy—all his own—expressing more affection for her than she had ever dreamed it possible he should feel for her.

Belle was sure that she was once more regarded with approval, and looked upon with confidence, and the thought was very sweet to her; but, as she read the last line of her long letters, she felt disappointed, that there was not one word said of her return to the home she loved, and the parents she now so anxiously desired to honor. She shed a few bitter tears, and then her better feelings triumphed.

"I deserve it, I know I do. I will try and improve where I am, that they may find me really altered, really fit to be with them by-and-bye," she said, and strengthened her resolution with prayer, without which the best resolutions are as easily broken as the wreath of mist that divides in the morning sunlight.

She set herself forthwith to study earnestly what her father had written, after first expressing his free pardon for her past offences,

and hearty joy at her having learned in whom to trust. It was as follows :

ADVICE TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

“Having entered the heavenly path, it is important to obtain a thorough knowledge of the Word of God, which is a ‘guide to the feet, and a lamp to the path.’ It is better for those to whom spiritual life is new, to read *often* in the Holy Scriptures, than to strive to read *much* at a time. Have four fixed seasons, during the day, devoted to the Bible : a psalm in the morning, a few verses in the Gospels at noon, a few verses from the Epistles before tea, and a passage from the Prophets before retiring. On Sunday, read the historical portions of the Old Testament in course, in addition to your usual daily reading. Never read the Word of God without prayer for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, and enlighten your understanding. Do not read as a form ; go to your Bible as to a friend for counsel and for comfort, and you will learn to find them there.

“Do not spend much time thinking of your past life, or of your own character, or you will be dispirited and discouraged.

“Through Christ your sins are all freely forgiven, and, unworthy as you now are, God is willing to own you as His dear child, for the sake of His crucified Son. Thus pardoned and received, you are free to go forward cheerfully as a *follower* of Christ. A *follower* of Christ, keep your Guide ever in sight, His humbly bearing the cross, His sinlessness in the midst of temptation, and His purity. His forgivingness and immeasurable love will, if watched and studied, make your way easy and your burden light.

“Speak to your Guide freely and frequently, and you shall find your prayers answered by Him who is a faithful promiser.

“Make no *great plans* for usefulness; be content to do, day by day, the little humble duties your Master allots as your task. Be a faithful Christian in the narrow sphere now given you, and you will be prepared for greater duties, when Providence shall open to you the

way. Do not slight the promptings of conscience, even about matters that seem most trifling. Regard the motions of that inner guide, and God will make it unerring in pointing you to the way of truth.

“In conclusion, trust Christ, love Christ, live with Christ, be Christ-like!”

Belle took down her Bible and carefully arranged marks in the different places where she was to read, and then, having asked for the blessing of God, she read a part of the first chapter of John, with deep interest.

She was lost in the thoughts which these words aroused, when Miss Hansy came in, to summon her to the dining-room, to see a guest—no other than the pastor, Mr. Heber. After giving Belle a kindly greeting, Mr. Heber told her that he had come on business, as well as to pay a friendly visit. Belle half rose, and looked significantly at Miss Hansy, to know if she should withdraw.

“My business is with you, Miss Belle,” said Mr. Heber, smiling. “You are to be

my pupil, so says your father, in a letter I received from him this morning. You are to come to me to recite for two hours, three mornings in the week: what days shall we fix upon?"

"Oh, that will be so very pleasant!" said Belle, with great animation. "Any days will suit me. You had better consult your own convenience, sir."

"Well, then, Monday must be one day, of course, and Wednesday another; and I think we must take Friday for the third. Will that do?"

"Yes, indeed," said Belle; "but what shall I study?"

"Oh, we can agree upon that when you have passed your examination," said Mr. Heber, smiling.

The conversation now turned upon Nanny, and the hearty kindness with which her little ones were treated at Tilden farm. Miss Hansy began to grow uneasy, and at length said, "If thee will excuse me a moment, I will see if all is ready for thee in the wing."

"Certainly!" said Mr. Heber, with a compassionate look. "I want your help in the Sunday-school, Miss Belle," he added, as Miss Hansy left the room.

Belle colored deeply, and did not reply.

"I want you to take a class of little girls," continued Mr. Heber. "We are in want of teachers, for our school grows rapidly."

"I am not fit for a Sunday-school teacher," said Belle, with her usual frankness.

"I can hardly believe that, Miss Belle, with such parents as you have. You must, like Timothy, have been trained in the knowledge of the Scriptures. I hope your heart has not rejected the truths, with which I am sure you are well acquainted," said Mr. Heber, soberly.

"I have been all wrong, all wrong, always," said Belle, the tears springing to her eyes; "but, indeed, I am trying to do differently." There was an earnestness in Belle's manner that could not be mistaken, and Mr. Heber's face was bright with a pure joy, as he felt assured that his young friend was turning her feet heavenward.

A long, frank conversation followed, which was most welcome to Belle, and in her heart she rejoiced that God had sent her such a friend and adviser.

"The conversation had been so interesting to Mr. Heber that he had not remarked Miss Hansy's protracted stay.

An unusual noise in the side hall attracted his attention, and he opened the door suddenly. Amos was stumbling along the passage, staggering under the burden of Miss Hansy's tall figure. Her pale face was thrown back over his arm, and her long brown hair was streaming down almost to the ground.

"What has happened? Tell me, quickly!" said Mr. Heber, anxiously.

"He's dealt her another, almost as bad," said Amos. "If he don't go to the hospital this time, it's a sin."

"I am not much hurt," said Miss Hansy feebly, as she struggled to rise. "For shame, Amos, to speak so of your master."

The indignant blood had rushed to the cheeks of Belle at the announcement Amos

had made, but it faded away as Miss Hansy spoke.

“Where are you injured?” said Mr. Heber, anxiously.

“I believe I sprained my foot in falling,” said Miss Hansy, feebly.

The ankle, which was rapidly swelling, now became very painful, and Belle began promptly, under the direction of Mr. Heber, to make some efforts for Miss Hansy’s relief.

CHAPTER X.

MISS HANSY'S STORY.

THE injury so soon done was not so easily relieved. For many days Miss Hansy was confined to the sofa, on which she lay. Patient as she was under her own sufferings, there seemed some anxiety on her mind which she could not overcome.

She had frequent private interviews with Amos, and even before Belle she sometimes gave orders which evidently were intended to promote the comfort of some unmentioned person.

That this nameless one, so thought of and so cared for, could be the miserable sin-marked old man whom she had seen, Belle could hardly believe, and yet, by degrees, this conviction was forced upon her. Who was he, and what tie bound the pure spirit of Miss

Hansy to such a being? With questions like these Belle, in vain, wearied herself, but they were to be suddenly and unexpectedly answered.

The physician from Sanders had, on the fifth day after the accident, pronounced Miss Hansy quite unfit for exertion, and doomed to at least a week longer of quiet rest. The sentence seemed a hard one to the patient, and she pleaded to be allowed to go just a few steps every day, but the doctor was decided in his refusal. After his departure, Miss Hansy fell into a fit of silent thought, from which Belle did not feel inclined to rouse her. It was broken in upon by a visit from Mr. Heber, who had daily made his appearance since the accident, and had already commenced a course of study with Belle.

She was now anxious to improve, and these opportunities seemed to her very precious. The hours flew rapidly by, while she sat in the room with Miss Hansy preparing her lessons, and she had quite lost the feeling of loneliness with which she had been oppressed.

Miss Hansy lay quite still during Belle's recitation, and, at times, seemed for a moment interested in what she had heard, and then the sad, thoughtful look would again appear on her face.

The lessons over, Mr. Heber turned again toward Miss Hansy, as if he would know her wishes. She understood the appeal, and spoke as follows:

"Amos tells me I am sadly missed—he sinks for want of amusement,—he wants to be read to, he wants to hear a woman's voice, he thinks it would ease his pain. Perhaps, perhaps Belle would be willing. Tell her all, and ask her if she will try for a day or two to do something to cheer a sufferer."

Belle's blood tingled at the very thought. She approach that horrid old man! She could not think of it; and her lips opened to speak her thoughts, but Mr. Heber drew her gently away.

She let herself be conducted into the quiet, unfrequented parlor. There Mr. Heber sat down beside her, and was for a moment

silent. Belle nerved herself to hear some tale of horror, but of what nature she could not imagine.

Mr. Heber began by describing a luxurious home in a distant city, where a father, richly endowed in mind and body, lived with his wife and baby-child. He told of the anguish of the devoted wife as she saw the husband she loved fall a prey to temptation, and sink at last into hopeless dissipation. He dwelt on the respectful tenderness of the wife towards him who was no longer worthy of respect, and of the habits of filial duty in which she trained her only child. He painted the sudden death of that mother, and her last parting words to her daughter. "Be kind, be patient, be faithful unto death! Remember he is thy father! Remember the Commandment with promise!"

Belle listened with wonder and admiration, and almost with remorse, as she heard how the young and attractive girl had devoted herself to a parent so unworthy; how she had spent her best years in trying to make

home pleasant to one on whom disease was already wreaking the punishment for sin. No irritability, no tumults of insane rage, on his part, could ruffle her "peace, passing understanding." When a missile, thrown by him in a paroxysm of causeless rage, put out the light of one of her calm eyes, the other shed no tears for its loss, but was lifted in prayer for the father who had smitten his child.

When the worldly possessions of the unworthy parent had been squandered, and, prostrate with years and infirmity, he would have been homeless and houseless, she spent her little all, received from her mother, to build for him a home in the country, where he could end his days in quiet, and none would point at him as the wreck of his former self.

With the help of Mr. Heber, the wing to this little country house had been built and fitted up for his comfort, and hither, in the darkness of night, Miss Hansy had come, with faithful Amos, to devote her life to the fulfilment of the Commandment with promise.

She admitted no prying menials to find out the secrets of her little sanctuary. With the help of humble Amos she carried on her simple establishment, little caring that the villagers attributed her seclusion to a morbid regret for the loss of the eye, that had left to her face the beauty which would last eternally—its pure heavenly expression.

Belle wept as she listened to the story which Mr. Heber told, with the earnestness of one who knows himself to be speaking only faithful facts. Her tears were in sympathy for the sufferings of Miss Hansy, and in admiration of her self-denying constancy—but, mingled with these, were many bitter ones, as she thought of her own disrespect to her noble father, and wilful, inexcusable unkindness to her lovely mother. The lesson sank deep, and bore with it the blessing of heaven.

“Miss Hansy has become a necessary part of her father’s existence, and, broken down as he is now, in mind and body, he suffers much from her absence, and is, as Amos says,

and as I have seen myself, failing for lack of the sweet music of his daughter's voice. He has quite forgotten the blow he would have dealt her, and in escaping which she occasioned the injury from which she is now suffering. He calls out for her and moans after her, like a child. She thinks your voice, which she has learned to love, may soothe him until she can be again beside him. She reads to him the Bible only, or hymns, with which he was long ago familiar, by which she hopes to touch some chord that may rouse him to better things. Will you try, Miss Belle? There is no danger. He cannot leave his seat, and you need not approach him."

An indignant negative rose to the lips of the young girl, but she thought of Jesus, ministering to a suffering, sinful world; she thought of Miss Hansy's years of patient devotedness, and of the gentle glance of her single eye, and answered, though faintly, "I will."

CHAPTER XI.

THE DAUGHTER'S REWARD.

BELLE was not timid; she had seldom known what it was to suffer from embarrassment, yet she trembled as she stood at the door of the invalid's sitting-room, and paused a moment before giving a feeble knock.

A hoarse voice called out, "come in," and she slowly obeyed.

A nearer view of the face which had made such an impression upon her at a distance, did not take away from the hearty dislike she had conceived, and she stood for an instant in hesitation, half-inclined to withdraw and give up the undertaking.

"Sit down!" said the voice, in a tone of command.

Belle mechanically dropped upon the nearest chair.

"Amos says thee will read. I doubt if thee knows how. Begin!" said Mr. Ware.

Belle opened her Bible, and commenced the first psalm.

She was but a poor reader, at the best, and now her voice was choked, and her manner confused.

She was interrupted before she had finished the psalm by an impatient "psha," and the words, "Shut the book! I'd rather hear a broken hand-organ. Can you sing?"

Belle's spirit was thoroughly roused by this uncourteous treatment, and she answered boldly, "I can try!"

Her voice was naturally strong and clear, and she had been accustomed to singing from childhood. She had never sung better than now, and her listener looked at her with surprise and pleasure. She had begun the hymn, "O where shall rest be found," in no very fitting frame of mind, but as she went on, the sacred words made their impression on her, and before she closed there was an anxious desire, on her part, to bring home the

truths of the hymn to the heart of her auditor, that told in the feeling tones in which she sang.

"Sing again!" said Mr. Ware, in a more softened voice.

Belle sang again and again, each time urged on by an approving nod. At last there was no sign from the old man. He sat in perfect stillness, his eyes closed, and his clasped hands lying on his lap. Belle thought that he had fallen into a quiet sleep, and she rose to leave the room. As she did so, she saw tears rolling from under the closed lids, and turning away, she went out silently.

Day after day Belle spent a half-hour in the room of the invalid. It cost her much effort and many prayers to go to this trying duty, but she was rewarded by a consciousness of her divine Master's approval, and by the sweet kiss of gratitude with which Miss Hansy welcomed her on her return.

To these visits Miss Hansy had but once alluded, and then, only by saying, "My

mother sang, oh ! so sweetly, but I have no voice."

A week had passed since Belle's first interview with Mr. Ware, when she found, one morning, on coming down to breakfast, that Miss Hansy's place on the sofa was vacant, and she heard her uncertain footsteps, as, assisted by Amos, she moved down the passage leading to her father's room.

Amos left her at the door, and Miss Hansy entered alone.

"How art thou, father ? I have been so anxious to get to thee !" said Miss Hansy, in her kindest manner.

"Ill enough, Hansy, ill enough ! I'm glad to see thee back again. Hansy, I don't want to be bad to thee any more ; I don't, indeed," and the old man began to cry. "Thee has taken care of me many, many years, and I thank thee for it."

"It has been a pleasure, father," said Miss Hansy earnestly, as she knelt by his side, her face bright with joy, and her heart full of deep gratitude. Her life of patient forbearance

seemed to have met its full reward. To hear such words as these, seemed to be too blessed to be real.

“Read, child,” said the father, “read.”

Miss Hansy did read words of peace and comfort from the blessed Gospel she loved, and her father really listened.

Miss Hansy's absence had produced an impression which her years of devotion had failed to do. What she had been to his daily life, and how unworthy he had been of such kindness, made its way to the shattered mind and dull heart of her father.

That heart once softened, Miss Hansy strove with redoubled efforts to sow there the good seed that “springeth up into eternal life.” As the months flew by, the mind of her father grew gradually weaker and weaker; but with the remnants of its remaining strength passed away the paroxysms of rage and the wearing irritability, between which he had alternated for years.

“Helpless and dependent as a child, he was as submissive. He learned to obey Miss

Hansy's slightest word, and to look up to her with a kind of affectionate reverence. No longer fearful that he would disgrace himself by acts of violence, Miss Hansy rejoiced to see him sitting on the porch in the pleasant summer air, or being rolled in his great chair, by Amos, up and down the wide pavement. Ever as he moved, his eyes followed the figure of his daughter, and at each turn he looked to catch her kind smile. He loved to listen as she talked to him, and the answers he made in his childish way often filled her heart with hope.

She had been pointing out the gilded clouds on a summer evening, and telling him that the glory of the western sky was not half as beautiful as the brightness of heaven, where Jesus would be with those that love Him.

"I don't think I'm fit to go there, somehow; I can't remember why," said the old man, sorrowfully. "You'll go, I know, Hansy, and then what will become of me?" he added, and then sobbed like a child.

"We are none of us fit to go to heaven,"

said Miss Hansy, speaking very slowly, as if she wished to be sure of being understood. "Jesus suffered for us. He suffered that we might be happy. If we are sorry for what we have done, and trust Jesus, and try to love Him, we shall be forgiven for all that is past, and made welcome in heaven."

"I am sure I am very sorry," said the old man weakly. "I want to love Jesus, you talk so much about; but somehow I can't think"—and he put his hand to his troubled head.

"If you really want to love Jesus, He will help you, father," said Miss Hansy, tenderly. "Don't try too hard to think about it, but just let yourself love Him."

"I do want to," said the poor father. "Perhaps in heaven it will all be clear again; but, no! I don't want to remember. No, no! It's all bad! You love me, Hansy, don't you?"

"Yes, yes! dear father, I do!" said Miss Hansy, warmly and truly.

"Perhaps Jesus will love me too, if He is

so good;" and the old man looked up with a bright smile.

Miss Hansy's heart was too full of hope and thanksgiving for her to speak one word, but her face beamed a reply.

In his weakness and darkness the poor old man seemed to grope after the hand of his Saviour, led by his daughter's voice and accompanied by her prayers.

We may not know the secrets of the eternal world; but God loves to hear the prayers of those who keep His commandments and continue in His love; and we may hope that a blessing was poured out on the unworthy father, in answer to the life-long petition of the daughter, who lived near to God and kept His Commandment with promise.

CHAPTER XII.

SUNDAY SCHOLARS.

SEED-time and harvest had passed away, and autumn tints began here and there to brighten the forest trees, and make gay the wild vines in the hedges.

While the busy farmers had cared for the tender blade, watched the ripening grain, and gathered the fruits of toil into their store-houses, Belle Cortlandt had not been idle. For her the summer had been a season of real spiritual growth, and of willing exertion in her Master's cause. She had struggled faithfully to bring her strong will into obedience to the law of Christ, and had rejoiced at each sign of self-conquest. She had aided Miss Hansy in her ministry of love to her weak and humbled parent, and had labored earnestly for the best good of the little girls who

formed her Sunday-school class. Reluctant as she had been at first to take upon herself the office of a teacher, she soon felt great pleasure in her new duties. The children entrusted to her care were poor and ignorant, and she found that, unworthy as she was, she could yet be of great service to them. Among the little circle who met her so warmly every Sunday morning, no face brightened with a sweeter smile than that of little Jany, whose cheeks were now somewhat rounded by the plenty of Tilden farm, and yet a look of sorrow still lingered on her delicate features.

It was one of Mr. Heber's rules that the teachers in his Sunday School should visit each scholar at home once a month, and from this practice, faithfully adhered to, he had seen much good flow.

To Belle, these visits were at first exceedingly trying. Several of her children lived near a factory, a mile beyond Sanders, and it cost Belle a great effort to find her way to their homes. Her frank, kindly manner soon won her a welcome among them, and she

was often amused at the free, familiar way in which she was treated, and at the apparent satisfaction taken in her visits. She tried to make her conversation useful to the mothers of the children under her charge, but often she was forced to take leave with the conviction of failure on her mind. It was as Jany's Sunday-school teacher that Belle first made her appearance at Tilden farm. She was cordially greeted, and at once made at home. She soon found that here she became a learner, and she felt that the position suited her well. There was a hearty sincerity in Mrs. Tilden's piety, a matter-of-fact, confident belief in spiritual things, that was a great help to Belle. She never left Tilden farm without being better able to realize the continual presence of God as a loving friend, and the certainty of the heaven in store for His children, through Christ.

It became a custom with Belle to finish the afternoon spent in visiting her scholars by taking tea at Tilden farm. On these occasions little Jany never forgot that the visit

was especially to her, and she felt privileged to keep close to the side of her teacher and give her an occasional caress, which she might not otherwise have dared to offer. Mrs. Tilden encouraged this freedom, and seldom failed to manage to leave Belle a few moments alone with her pupil that she might have an opportunity of winning her confidence, and giving her a word of advice.

It was a bright afternoon early in October. Belle had started out full of energy, and intent on doing good. She really enjoyed the long walk across the fields, between Miss Ware's quiet home and the bustling vicinity of the factory.

She had not now to seek out the humble dwellings of her little charge; to them she easily made her way as to a familiar spot. There was no lack of cordiality in the greeting she received. The children gathered round her, and the stout mothers sat down by her side and told her freely of their cares and interests.

One had a son so wild and troublesome,

that, to use the mother's own words, "He almost set her crazy," and she wanted to know what she should do with him.

Another was tired with a leaky roof which the landlord was in vain implored to mend.

A third, by her own account, was a victim to every disease and pain under the skies, and could' find no relief but in "a bit of whiskey now and then, or some sich like, jist to ease the misery."

Belle tried to advise and comfort to the best of her ability, but she felt young and inexperienced before the assurance and volubility of her humble friends. She tried to think of some way of giving an improving turn to the conversation—some way of bringing the great Friend of the poor, and the only eternal riches, before their minds; but no words came, her brain seemed barren and her mouth dry.

Belle was too young in the religious life to have words of spiritual counsel flow freely from her lips. It was yet only by constant effort that she was able to keep before her,

in any measure, the truths in which she believed. It is only those who have learned to live with Christ as with a familiar friend, and who are in the constant habit of communion with Him, who can so speak of him naturally and conscientiously, and fix the attention of those to whom He is still a stranger. Belle did not know this fact, and, sure of her own anxious desire to be useful, she wondered at the constraint which kept her silent when she would have borne the message of love.

Somewhat disheartened, she closed the last visit she had to pay in the vicinity of the factory, and turned her steps towards Tilden farm.

Once beyond the smoke, and dust, and stir every where around the tall chimneys that made work for so many men, her spirits began to revive. In the green fields again, she could realize the presence of the Father of all, and she felt that if she had the children there, she should not be so shy of naming the best of subjects, and she even thought that under the blue skies she might have spoken to the

talkative mother, of that world where sorrow and care never come.

Still dissatisfied with herself, though somewhat soothed by the sweet and holy influence God has given to nature, she drew near to the gate that marked the entrance to Tilden farm.

She did not need to lift the heavy latch, or throw open the wide gate. A loving hand, if not a strong one, made her entrance easy. Little Jany had been watching for a half hour for the pleasure of letting her in, and that duty once performed, she slipped her hand into Belle's and walked by her side, the very picture of quiet content.

"How pleasant it always is here!" said Belle, as they moved along the lane under the wide-spreading maples. "It seems to me, I feel happier as soon as I step inside that gate."

"And I am so glad when you come," said Jany in her quiet way. "And—and I want so much to thank you."

"Thank me!" said Belle, smiling. "What for, Jany?"

"Oh, I should wish to lie down and die sometimes, like poor mother, if I did not think about what you have taught me," said Jany, half crying.

"Why, Jany!" said Belle, "I thought you were very happy; I am sure you ought to be in such a pleasant home."

"I can't forget about poor mother, and father, far away on the sea," said little Jany, dropping down on a great stone, and sobbing as if her heart would break. "Everybody is kind, even the boys, though they do play so rough sometimes. Everybody is kind, but there are so many here, and all so very happy, and I try to be happy too, and I do laugh sometimes, and then I go away and cry all by myself. I think I should quite give up then, if I did not think about the beautiful heaven you tell of, and the dear Lord Jesus who loves little children. Dear Miss Belle, do you think He loves me? If I was quite sure of that, I would not mind."

Belle put her arm round the little girl,

and said, very tenderly, "Jany, Jesus cares even for those who do not care for Him, and I am sure He loves you, if you want to love Him."

"I do love Him," said the child, earnestly. "I do, and I hope to go to Him some day. When I am very patient, and cheerful, I don't mind; but, Miss Belle, I feel so heavy sometimes, that I must just sit down and cry, and then I think perhaps Jesus is angry with me, and then I feel more sorry, and cry more."

"Jesus wept himself, Jany. He cried to think of the wicked city, Jerusalem, that would have to be punished, and He cried when He saw Martha and Mary so sorrowful at the grave of Lazarus, their brother. He will not be angry with your tears, little Jany; but if you think more about Him, and how He is always with you, and how He has taken your mother to His happy world, you will not be so sorrowful. Will you try, darling?"

"I will, Miss Belle," said Jany, in her

usual quiet way, "I will. I did not mean to tell you all, but somehow it all came out, just when I went to thank you. You are so very kind to me."

"And you are a great comfort to me, Jany," said Belle, affectionately. "Just this very afternoon, I was thinking I was of no use to any one, and that I could not make any one wish to do right, even if I tried."

"Oh, Miss Belle!" said Jany, her eyes full of astonishment. "Don't say such a word as that; the scholars all love you, and try to do as you say. Poor Becky White, who was so bad, says she never goes to bed now that she does not ask the Lord Jesus to make her a better girl; and that I know will please you."

Belle's heart was too full to answer; she pressed little Jany's hand, and they walked on in silence. Belle felt humbled, yet grateful, to find her poor efforts in her Master's cause were not in vain, that the seed sown in weakness was winning a blessing from the Lord of the harvest.

CHAPTER XIII.

TILDEN FARM.

WHEN Belle reached the house, the wide porch was full of young faces ready to welcome her, and, standing on the steps, was Mrs. Tilden, with outstretched hands.

"We were afraid you were not coming," said Johnny, pressing forward, "and then we might as well have had no supper at all."

"Supper!" said Belle, "am I so late as that?" as through the open door she saw the long table spread with the usual profusion of good cheer, and evidently awaiting her arrival.

"Better late than never!" said Mrs. Tilden, heartily. "*He's* just come in, so you are not much out of the way after all."

It took a little preliminary washing and brushing before Mr. Tilden was ready to

give his guest a welcome, and to sit down at his table, like Jacob of old, with his twelve about him. That Jacob's God was his Friend and Father, no one could doubt who heard the simple, solemn words of prayer and thanksgiving which he uttered before sitting down to his evening meal. Little Johnny's lips moved, and almost unconsciously his young voice kept his father's company, while the rest, even to the youngest, seemed to join him in silence.

The blessing over, the children quietly took their places, and put on for themselves, and for each other, pinafores, white as snow, and evidently fresh for the occasion.

"Bring baby," said Mr. Tilden to Susy, who was in attendance.

The "wee helpless thing" poor Nanny had left to the care of strangers was now a hearty child, more than six months old, and beginning, by its pretty winning ways, to give some return for the tender care it had received.

While Susy was taking the baby from its

cradle, where it quietly lay, though wide awake, Mr. Tilden occupied himself in preparing the bowl of bread and milk, which he thought a judicious supper for the child. Mr. Tilden would rather have gone hungry to bed, after a heavy day's labor, than to have taken his own food before he had satisfied the child of his adoption.

Mrs. Tilden thought, sometimes, this proceeding broke in somewhat upon her ideas of order and regularity at meals, but she consoled herself by saying, "It's *his* notion, *he* ought to have *his* way in *his* own house."

In fact, it soon became a pleasant sight to her to see the strong-built, kindly-looking man feeding the poor infant so carefully, and smacking his lips at every mouthful she swallowed, as if it did him more good than it could possibly do the child. Mrs. Tilden did not think her husband's course with regard to the diet of the baby altogether judicious, but she forebore discussion, and saw with wonder that little Nan thrived and grew fat, in spite (or in consequence) of the liber-

al allowance of good cheer bestowed on her by her foster father.

"God bless the baby!" said Mr. Tilden, heartily, as he restored her, satisfied and smiling, to Susan, to be replaced in the cradle, while the knives and forks kept on their busy work at the table.

Belle was no epicure, and her simple appetite of youth and health was always satisfied with the plain and almost uniform fare of Miss Hansy ; yet, it must be confessed that she thoroughly enjoyed Mrs. Tilden's good cheer, and did ample justice to it. She loved to see the happy faces round the table, and to hear the kind, motherly words and respectful answers coming and going.

These monthly visits were Belle's only glimpses at family life, and they were very precious to her.

After supper the children scattered away, some to the orchard in search of choice apples to fill the bag that was sure to be ready for Amos, when he came for Belle in the evening ; and some to finish their various

tasks for the day. Mr. Tilden withdrew to the porch and sat in quiet content, looking on the scene, while his wife busied herself about the table, and Belle sat and watched her active hand, and lent her some slight assistance.

"How busy you always are, Mrs. Tilden," said Belle; "I wonder that you can ever think about any thing but this world and all you have to do in it."

"That same thing gave me a great deal of trouble when I was first a mother and a housekeeper," said Mrs. Tilden. "Though I had such a little family then, it seemed to take me all my time to keep things in order, and I could hardly get a moment to read my Bible and fall on my knees; I really got quite unhappy about it, thinking I was just a 'mother,' and nothing better, 'cumbered with much serving,' instead of sitting at the feet of Jesus; and yet I did not know how to do my duty, and make the matter any better. One day *he* came in, and found me looking just as I felt, all troubled and flus-

tered, and just ready to cry, because I had so much on my hands that I really could not stop for any thing that was good. I just burst out crying, (I was young then,) and I told him all about it. Then *he* explained to me, in his own way, how, when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, those who wanted to hear His holy words must leave all their earthly business and sit at His feet, but that would not do for Christians every where and always, so there was a better way—‘Now,’ says *he*, ‘Jesus is not in any one house or any one room only, but all may be “diligent in business,” and yet have the Lord with them. Think of that, dear,’ said he, ‘and then you will do Martha’s work with Mary’s spirit.’ Those words did me a great deal of good; and now it seems quite natural to be working, with the Lord’s eye on me every where. But, Miss Belle, while I have kept you here talking, there’s Johnny waiting outside with a big apple in his hand, that I am sure he means for Miss Ware.”

The mother was right; Johnny wanted to

give particular directions that no one but Miss Hansy should have the beauty of the orchard he had chosen with such care.

Meanwhile, the other boys had filled the bag which little Jack was making a great show of lifting, as three or four of them bore it along.

"Come," said Johnny, "let us put it on the wheelbarrow, and take it down to the gate, and that will save old Amos something."

The proposal was heartily agreed upon, and the boys set off in high glee, Johnny acting as grand marshal, though it must be confessed the labor fell on the older boys. It was all their own fault, for they would have it so, and little Johnny was not to blame.

"Amos has gone off with the apples and left you, Miss Belle," said Johnny, as, after a short absence, he re-entered the porch, all out of breath with the run he had had.

"Gone and left me!" said Belle, starting up with astonishment; "What can that mean?" She caught up her bonnet and shawl, and

said hastily, "Then I must go as soon as possible, and some of you, boys, will have to take Amos's place."

"Ho, indeed!" said Johnny, with a merry laugh. "Look, Miss Belle!"

Belle did look, and saw her own father stepping up on the wide porch, his little escort of boys having fallen back, to let him meet his daughter alone.

Belle threw herself on her father's neck and wept violently, while he was little less moved than herself.

It was no time for an open expression of feeling, but each knew what the other would say, and Belle felt that the kiss which her father bestowed on her was the seal of his perfect forgiveness, and her heart was full of deep joy.

Mr. Cortlandt needed no introduction to the cheerful circle at Tilden farm, for Belle's frequent letters had made him thoroughly acquainted with each member of the family, from the kind-hearted father to little Nan, the pet of the house. He was soon quite at

home among them, and all felt it a privilege to listen to his wonderful tales of foreign lands, where Jesus is not known; and several of the young lads, among whom was our friend Johnny, mentally resolved to do something more to earn money for the missionaries, who were willing to go among these poor, ignorant people, and teach them the way of truth.

Jany felt particularly honored when Mr. Cortlandt drew her tenderly to his side, and told her she was almost like a little granddaughter to him, since Belle had taken so much interest in her. Little Jany's face was very bright all the evening, but it was suddenly overshadowed, when Mr. Cortlandt rose and said, "It was time for his pleasant visit to be over."

Several of the children sprang to get Belle's bonnet and shawl, but Johnny was successful in the race, and bore them back in triumph.

"Won't you stop for the coming hymn?" said Johnny in a low voice, as Belle stooped to take the things from him. "Oh, yes!" said

Belle, "I am sure father would like it." Mr. Cortlandt did indeed enjoy the hymn of praise in which the whole family joined with real heartiness and much taste. Mr. Cortlandt lent his aid, and Belle's voice, too, was heard with deep feeling in its sweet clear tones. After the hymn, there was a general shaking of hands, and then Belle and her father set out for their long walk.

Many, many inquiries Belle had to make about matters at home, and much she heard which could not be crowded even into the long and frequent letters she had received. She asked all questions, and approached all subjects freely, but one, and that was almost constantly on her mind. At last her father himself named the subject of her thoughts.

"Belle," he said, "your mother is most anxious to have you at home again, and Willy says he really pines for your society. I need not say how I should love to have you with us once more. Will you go home with me now, or wait until a few months later? Do you think you are sufficiently established in

your new principles to meet old temptations, and the power of old habits, which you know is very strong? If you feel that it is safe to make the experiment, most gladly shall I take you with me. Remember, that a failure in duty now will give you real remorse and a bitterness of self-reproach of which you, perhaps, have no idea. You need not decide now," he added, as they drew near the house. "You shall tell me your choice in the morning. Meanwhile, be sure that your father feels that you are as welcome to his home as to his heart, and that he does not doubt the deep sincerity of your new resolutions."

Miss Hansy was waiting in the now occupied parlor, when they entered the house. She was a little surprised to find Belle grave and thoughtful, instead of radiant with joy at her father's return; but she prudently forbore remarking on the subject.

Mr. Cortlandt immediately led the conversation to the family at Tilden farm, with whom he had been charmed.

"There seems such a tone of cheerfulness

and unaffected piety there, that it is really delightful," he said. "But your pet Jany, Belle, she does not look quite happy."

"She feels the loss of her mother deeply yet," said Belle. "Knowing such sorrow so early seems to have made a deep impression upon her, and I think she finds it hard to keep up with the cheerful, busy spirit at Tilden farm. She is a dear child, and tries hard to be bright and uncomplaining, and is very grateful for the kindness shown her."

"A more quiet home would suit her better," said Mr. Cortlandt, thoughtfully. "She is hardly fit to stand the rough-and-tumble among such a family of hearty, healthy youngsters, who do not mind a little rough play, I dare say."

"No, indeed!" said Belle, "they make what seems to me a perfect bedlam sometimes; but a word from Mrs. Tilden quiets them in a moment. I love to hear them even say 'mother,' they have such a way of speaking the word."

Here Belle fell into another quiet fit, and

Mr. Cortlandt again thought it best to take the lead in conversation.

"How is it, Hansy," he said, "that you have kept up your Quaker *thee* and *thou*, and that plain cap, too, when you have so long been a member of the Episcopal Church?"

"I lead such a quiet life," said Miss Hansy, smiling, "that it is of very little consequence how I dress at home, and then I seldom speak to any strangers who would take note of an occasional *thee*, which I use from habit. When I go to church, which cannot be very often, I wear a bonnet about which nobody in our plain congregation would ask any questions; I don't think even *you* could tell what to call it, if you wanted to buy a match to it for Mary Cortlandt. But seriously, Harry, I believe I love to wear this cap and speak the plain language, because my mother always did, and I know it is pleasant to my father."

"I did not think Mr. Ware would have recognized me, it is so many years since we met, yet he called me by name almost immediately."

"Yes," said Miss Hansy, brightening, "and he seemed so much pleased to see you. 'Tell Harry I shall want to see him in the morning,' were his last words before bidding me good-night."

"Speaking of bidding 'good-night,' that is just what we ought to be doing," said Mr. Cortlandt; "I have a busy day before me to-morrow; among other things, Belle, I am to go among your factory people, so we must not sit here chatting any longer."

Very sweet to Belle was Miss Hansy's affectionate kiss at parting; but sweeter were her father's embrace and his fervent blessing.

CHAPTER XIV.

LITTLE JANY.

As the months had passed rapidly by, Belle had become more and more sensible of the deep guilt of the fault which she had allowed herself so constantly and so thoughtlessly to commit, and which had finally led to her expulsion from the home she really loved. By her daily study of the Scriptures this impression was, in a great measure, produced. The burning words of condemnation and the fearful threatenings there written down against the undutiful, unnatural child, went home to her heart, like pointed arrows from a skilful archer.

Even for these wounds there was balm in Gilead, comfort in the Word of God. There she read of the welcome of the repentant prodigal, and of the strength promised to

all those who struggle against a besetting sin, in the name of Jesus.

After much thought over her sad misdoings in former days, and many prayers, Belle decided upon her course in reference to her father's proposal. Her decision once made, her natural cheerfulness returned, and even buoyant with gladness she went down to the breakfast table.

Miss Hansy, as usual, was with her father, and Belle and Mr. Cortlandt were tête-à-tête.

"Well, my daughter," said the father, after bidding her good-morning, "am I to take you with me to-morrow?"

"Father," said Belle, her eyes filling unexpectedly with tears, "father, I may do wrong again, but I will try and trust in God to help me. Life is uncertain, and if I put off my return, I may never have an opportunity to be what I ought to you and dear mother. This thought decides me, and then I do so want to be with you all again. May I go?"

"Yes! I say yes, with all my heart!"

said the father, warmly, nor did he add one discouraging word to check the joy that shone through the tears of his daughter.

When Miss Hansy came in, after breakfast, she was heartily sorry to hear how soon she was to part with her young friend, and Belle felt real pleasure at the sincere expressions of attachment which Miss Hansy let fall in her surprise.

"I do not think I can get on without some young person here now," said Miss Hansy. "Belle, how shall we make your place good? Father will so miss your singing."

Belle's face grew suddenly bright, as with an idea that pleased her. "Jany has a sweet little voice of her own, Miss Hansy. Father, how would that do?" she said with much animation.

"I think you would like, Hansy, to take the motherless child to your heart. She needs more fostering care than she can get where she is one of twelve," said Mr. Cortlandt.

"I am afraid the little thing would be lonely here, and yet my heart yearns towards her," said Miss Hansy.

"You might at least try it for awhile," said Belle. "I think Jany would be happier here, with you, than she is among so many."

The sound of wheels, stopping at the gate, arrested the attention of the speakers, as it was not a common occurrence at Miss Ware's quiet home.

There was soon a decided rap, low down on the front door, which proved to have proceeded from Johnny's hard little knuckles. He had come full of glee to say, "Brother Tom has brought down father's gray horse and the buggy, and father wants Mr. Cortlandt to just use them to-day as if they were his own."

"I shall do so, right gladly," said Mr. Cortlandt. "I thought I had more walking before me than I could conveniently do, but now I shall have an hour to spare, to come and see you all again. You must tell your father I shall try and look in upon you to-

day at twelve, as I want to see you all together. I suppose that is your dinner-hour?"

"Yes, that's the hour, sir, and mother never varies from it five minutes, by the clock. I don't see how she can hit it so every day," said Johnny.

"Well, master Johnny, we will try and be as punctual. Don't forget to thank your father for thinking about the horse."

"You are quite welcome, I am sure," said the boy, with a parting bow, and then away he ran to tell his more diffident brother about the promised visit.

Belle was delighted to be able to accompany her father, though she had very little idea as to what his business could be in the vicinity.

She was seated comfortably beside him in the buggy, and he was just gathering up the reins, when Miss Hansy came stepping down the wide pavement, at a more rapid pace than was her wont.

"Harry," she said, "thee may bring the child away with thee from the farm, if the

little thing is not afraid of an old maid like me, and the Tildens can trust her with me. I want a young face to look at, and so does father, he says."

"We'll bring you Jany towards evening, I think," said Mr. Cortlandt, smiling. "Never call yourself an old maid, Hansy, or I will tell about old times."

Miss Hansy blushed, and turned away suddenly towards the house.

"Do tell me about old times and Miss Hansy," said Belle, as the buggy left the gate.

"Miss Hansy shall keep her own secrets, though I know much of her past life that would deeply interest you. She was a model of filial devotion when her beauty was in its freshness, and her heart warm with the affections of youth. Mr. Heber could tell you even more than I of her early days. It was through my chance, or rather providential, meeting with him, that I learned where she had fixed her home—that sad day, last winter."

"Did you know Mr. Heber, too, before?" asked Belle, with surprise.

“Yes, Belle, and to him I owe the deepest gratitude that one human being can feel for another. It was he who first taught the wild and headstrong Harry Cortlandt to look upward and trust in his God.”

Thus chatting, the time passed pleasantly away. Belle had never before felt so near to her father—so able to understand him and his noble aims and wishes. His confidence drew out her own, and much was said that day by the roadside which He who walked with the disciples to Emmaus no doubt heard and approved.

As they approached the cluster of buildings collected round the tall chimneys of the factory, Mr. Cortlandt checked the strong horse, and taking his purse from his pocket, he said: “Here, Belle, here is your accumulated pocket-money. It has grown to quite a sum since you left home. You may do what you please with it.”

“I have not felt the need of it at all, father, except—except when I wanted something to give away. I think I had got too much in the

habit of spending money for nonsense, without any thought, but now I shall try to do better."

"Well, daughter, I shall leave you here at the store; I know you will want some keepsakes for your Sunday scholars, and you can be busy selecting while I go into the office."

Belle was a very bright-looking customer when she entered the store, and the slender clerk sprang promptly forward to know her wishes.

"I don't know what I want yet," she said, smiling, as she looked round upon the ludicrous variety of articles collected upon the shelves and ranged along the sides of the little building.

The clerk turned away in despair before Belle made up her mind even what to look at. She first took a private survey of her funds, and then mentally tried to make a satisfactory division of them among the various claimants upon her generosity. She must care for her poor Sunday scholars first; but she would like some token of remembrance for Miss Hansy and the Tildens, and then there

was Mr. Heber, and then old Amos should not be forgotten.

A second survey of the small shop-keeper's stock in trade made Belle reluctantly conclude to confine her purchases to gifts for the children and old Amos, as there was a plain absurdity in giving calico, flannel, and earthen-ware, by way of remembrancers, to her old friends.

Having procured a comfortable Sunday dress for each of her scholars, and some small working implements for the field and the house for the little Tildens, she was superintending the putting up of her packages, when her father came in."

"Well, Belle," he said, cheerfully, "are you ready for your visits? I can go with you now."

Belle was a little startled at the idea of having her father for a spectator to her discomfiture before the strong, voluble mothers of her children; but she looked at her packages, and thus armed, she hoped she should do better than usual.

Mr. Cortlandt put the various purchases in

the buggy, and in a few moments Belle found herself among the homes of her little friends.

Mr. Cortlandt was pleased to observe the cordial manner in which Belle was greeted, and she felt strengthened and supported by her father's presence. He at once engaged the mothers in conversation, and thus gave Belle the opportunity of talking with the children, and distributing her gifts unobserved. Belle could not help wondering at the ease with which her father met the murmurs of the women, and the kindly but direct way in which he pointed out their own share in bringing about the evils they suffered, and the only sure and lasting relief for all sorrow and trial. He had a simple remedy to propose for the body racked with pain, a course of treatment to suggest for the unruly son, and a promise to give to one and all of more comfort in their homes and more interest in them on the part of their employers. At each cottage he announced the weekly opening of a vacant ware-room, for a service for the men and women, and obtained a promise of influence and attendance. Little

by little, Belle discovered that her letters on the subject of the condition of the factory people had led her father to see the too busy city owner of the property, and obtain from him a permission to have all grievances redressed, and a direct effort made for the spiritual good of the people laboring to multiply his gains, as well as to earn their daily bread.

There was a general lamentation among the children when they heard that this was to be their last meeting with their teacher, and Becky White, who had once been the most troublesome member of the class, covered her face to hide her tears, as she said "Oh, Miss Belle, I can't have you go and leave me, just when I am beginning to try to be better."

"Jesus will never leave you, Becky; pray to Him and He will help you," whispered Belle.

"I will," said poor Becky, with deep earnestness, and Belle felt, as she shook hands with the tall, coarse-looking girl, that she was really parting with one she cared for, one drawn near to her in Christian bonds.

Belle and her father had much to talk of as they rode from the factory to Tilden farm, and her heart was full of gratitude on learning that through her humble efforts for her poor scholars, they had been brought into notice, and would doubtless reap much good, both temporal and spiritual.

As the gray horse stopped instinctively at the wide gate with which he was so familiar, Mr. Cortlandt said, "Not yet, old fellow,—you must wait a moment here."

The "bonny gray" grew quite impatient before he was permitted to tread the green lane. Mr. Cortlandt had his own large parcel to open, which he had that morning placed in the buggy himself. It contained a handsome set of engravings of scenes from Scripture. Belle admired the beauty of the scenes and approved the neat frames, and was heartily delighted when her father told her he had brought them for her to present as a parting gift to the family who had treated her with such frank kindness, and from whom she had learned so many valuable lessons.

After dinner was over at the farm, Belle had the pleasure of seeing the general satisfaction with her gifts, and of witnessing the hanging of the Scripture scenes in the large parlor, Mr. Tilden and all the children assisting at the ceremony.

When this important matter was attended to, Mr. Tilden took Nan and stepped out upon the porch to give the baby her usual after-dinner ride in his strong arms. Mr. Cortlandt followed, and said, "I came partly on business to-day, Mr. Tilden; I want to know if you can spare Nanny's little girl, to comfort Miss Hansy when Belle is gone."

"Never, while I live!" said Mr. Tilden, and he pressed the babe more closely to his heart.

Mr. Cortlandt saw by this gesture, and the glance at the baby, that his meaning had been mistaken, and hastened to say, "I do not mean your pet there, but little Jany."

"Jany!" said Mr. Tilden with an air of relief, "Jany, I should not like to spare her either—she is welcome to stay at Tilden farm, as long as we have a roof over us."

"I do not doubt that, but you have a houseful of your own, and Miss Hansy has but a little family at the best, and few to care for. That poor old man can not last long, and then what a comfort it will be to her to have a young heart to turn to. What say you? may Jany go?"

"If that's her choice; but she shan't go against her will. And her home is here, here always, when she is not with Miss Ware. That must be understood," said Mr. Tilden, almost bluntly.

Mrs. Tilden's consent was not more easily gained.

She was in no hurry to part with the motherless little one to whom she had opened her heart.

On Belle the task devolved of finding out the wishes of Jany herself.

At first it was hard to discover what the child wanted, for she would only cry and cling to Belle, saying she could not part with her sweet young lady; and she was quite too sorrowful to think of any thing else.

After much comforting and coaxing, the child was calmed and ready to give her attention to the proposal made.

She caught at the idea of being useful to Miss Hansy, which Belle put forward as the great inducement for changing her home.

It was now that Jany showed the full strength of her gratitude to those who had sheltered her in her helplessness. "They have cared for all three of us, and Mrs. Tilden has many steps to take. Jany is glad to go and do something for herself," said the little thing at length, "and by-and-by, when Jany knows more, and is a better girl, and all the others are grown up and gone away, Jany will come back to take care of Papa and Mamma Tilden, and live with little Nan. That will be the way, won't it, Miss Belle?"

"Perhaps so, Jany," said Belle, trying to encourage her.

In this spirit, Jany saw her little wardrobe packed and stowed away in the buggy, and cheerfully took her seat on the small trunk which contained her valuables.

Belle was glad when the parting with her kind country friends was over, and her heart was too full to talk as her father drove rapidly towards Miss Ware's.

Miss Hansy gave little Jany one of her kind kisses, and led her gently up the steps to her new home.

The atmosphere seemed to suit Jany at once. "It is sweet and quiet here, and I like it," she whispered to Belle, as she bade her good-night. "I think I shall learn to be good here, and that is best."

Twenty-four hours after Jany was established in her new home, Belle had bidden adieu to Miss Hansy, heard Mr. Ware's feeble words of regret at parting, and was far on her journey.

Mr. Heber was again among the passengers, and his presence seemed to make Belle doubly alive to the change in her views and character since they were before shut up in the same stage-coach.

To the conversation between the old clergyman and her father, she was no longer

an idle listener, half interested and half forgetful of its progress. The subjects of which they talked had become dear to her, too, and when they spoke of the factory people and their improvement, she became so much absorbed that, had the coach moved at railroad pace, she could not have seemed to pass more rapidly onwards.

As they drew near her own dear home, on the second day of their journey, Belle grew sad at the remembrance of all her past misconduct, and almost afraid to trust herself in the midst of old temptations. "Though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down," thought she, and in the comfort of this promise she put aside her fears, and gave way to the pleasant musing on the delight of being once more at home.

When she had been clasped in her mother's arms, warmly welcomed by Willy, and was again at the pleasant tea-table, she felt as if she were too happy, too much blessed, even to suffer a cloud to cross her brow or a murmur to enter her heart.

CHAPTER XV.

OLD TEMPTATIONS.

BELLE CORTLANDT had been at home a whole month, and the days had flown by as in a happy dream. Not a word of reproof had fallen on her ear since her return, and none indeed had been merited. It had been the daily effort of the repentant daughter to spare her mother every unnecessary care, and to minister to her comfort and pleasure. Belle had not been irritated by the continual teasing to which she had formerly been subjected, for Willy had made his own good resolutions. He had suffered much in secret from the thought that some mischief on his part had put Belle out of temper on the morning of her sudden exit from home, and he was determined to forbear the malicious pleas-

ure he had in seeing her dignity cast down, and her serenity ruffled.

Mr. Cortlandt watched with daily thankfulness the pleasant state of things under his roof, and rejoiced that he had had firmness to persevere in the plan that had been of such incalculable benefit to his daughter.

Willy Cortlandt, though a well-meaning, affectionate boy, was not guided by fixed principles, or accustomed to strict self-government. By degrees the respect he felt for Belle, after her long absence wore away, and in the familiarity of daily life he began to forget his good resolutions. Belle bore his renewed attacks with wonderful composure, and tried to answer him playfully, even while her color heightened, and her figure involuntarily straightened with rising indignation.

One morning Willy had exhausted, in vain, all the artillery that once was so effective. Belle, when no longer able to command herself had recourse to perfect silence. Willy, on his part, became irritated at last, and said, angrily, "I don't see any use in persons pre-

tending to be so good all on a sudden. I do hate a hypocrite, above all things."

"A hypocrite!" said Belle, indignantly, "that is too bad! Willy, you are the most provoking boy I ever saw in my life."

"See the saint! see the saint!" said Willy, dancing round Belle, and making wild leaps in the air, as he continued to shout, "See the saint!"

Belle was confused by the uproar, and thoroughly angry. She rose hastily to leave the room. Willy stood in her way, continuing his capers and shouts. Belle pushed him rudely aside with all her strength, and passed out.

As she was crossing the hall, she met her mother, who said to her, "Go dress yourself, quickly, Belle; there is a visitor in the parlor, and I want you there."

"I cannot come, now!" said Belle rudely, as she passed on.

"Stop, Belle!" said the mother, authoritatively, "stop!"

"I say I cannot come, now!" said Belle,

resolutely keeping on her way, as she muttered, "I wish I could ever be let alone!"

Not many minutes after Belle had uttered these angry words, she heard a carriage drive from the door, and when she again came down stairs the house was still and deserted. Willy was away at school, and her father and mother, she understood, had gone into town with their guest, to pass the day.

That long day was one of bitter repentance to poor Belle. Her resolutions had been broken, the feelings of her dear, forgiving mother again outraged, and Willy had received cause for believing that the new principles professed by his sister were indeed but an idle pretence.

Nor was this all. Belle bitterly remembered that the meek and gentle Saviour, who forgave His enemies on the cross, had been a grieved witness of her downfall. On her knees she sought His pardon, with a sorrow those only can know who have so sinned against their Redeemer and disgraced Him whom they would serve.

When Willy came home to dinner, he expected to find Belle sullen and silent. He had hardly entered the dining-room when she went up to him, and taking both of his hands in hers, she said—

“I was impatient and rude to you this morning, Willy; will you forgive me?” The tears in her eyes attested the sincerity of her regret, and her brother was at once touched.

“Forgive you, Belle!” he said, warmly; “I was the one in the wrong, and I thought I should never be so foolish again. Belle, I do not believe you are a hypocrite. There’s something real in a religion that could make you own up to a fault in that way. I know it goes hard with you. I love you better now than I ever did in my life!”

“It is indeed something real, Willy,” said Belle, earnestly. “And I do wish you would try to know more of it yourself. I know I am not fit to advise anybody; but indeed I am far happier than I used to be, before I even tried to do right.”

“And a great deal better and sweeter, I

say," said Willy, really moved by the humility of manner so unnatural to his sister's proud character. "Come, Belle, sit down to dinner, and I will try never to tease you again."

"And will you not try to be all I want you to be?" said Belle, earnestly.

"Perhaps," said Willy smiling; but in his heart he felt her tender appeal.

The afternoon seemed long to Belle, and when the night came on, dark and misty, Willy found it quite impossible to keep up his sister's spirits; she was impatient to beg the forgiveness of the mother whom she had disobeyed, and to own her entire unworthiness of all the tenderness and kindness she received.

The hours passed on, and in the darkness of the night there was no sound of wheels or trampling of hoofs. At last a slow and heavy tread was heard along the road that wound among the trees at Oakside.

Belle seized a light and ran to the door, and out into the misty air.

A sight met her eyes that filled her with

anguish. Stretched upon a litter lay her mother, pale and silent, while her father and Mr. Heber, sad and anxious, walked beside the strong men who carried her so carefully along.

On they bore her to her quiet room, and laid her gently on the bed. The physician who had accompanied them staid at her side, and himself attended to administering the remedies he had prescribed.

Belle felt the tender, trustful manner in which her father spoke to her as a constant reproach. She well understood that her loving mother had forborne mentioning the rudeness which had so grieved her in the daughter whom she had taken anew to her heart.

Mr. Heber had no time to ask Belle why she had not come in to enjoy the surprise her mother had intended for her in the morning. In the short interview he had with Belle, he had only time to tell her how the horses, affrighted by a sudden flash of lightning in the darkness of the night, had plunged down a steep bank, and how, under the broken re-

mains of the carriage, Mrs. Cortlandt had been found maimed and senseless.

It were useless to try to describe the anguish of Belle during the long night that passed, in which her mother's eyes never opened and her hands never stirred. Only the faint beating of her heart gave signs of continued life, and encouraged the anxious watchers at her bedside to make efforts for her restoration.

Firmly, with prayer, poor Belle resolved if she should ever hear that mother's voice again, never to allow herself, under any temptation, to speak to her one word which she should remember with pain when parted forever. She realized now the fearful truth, that there is but a step betwixt life and death, and the angry words that spring to the lips may be the last we are to speak to those we love.

The morning came, and with it slow signs of returning life. Belle longed to linger at her mother's side, but she feared the sight of her face might so strike her mother with pain as to send back to the heart the blood that

was now beginning faintly to tinge the pallid cheek, and warm the death-like fingers.

As unworthy to minister in the sick room, Belle shrank away. Her father sought her out, and found her weeping bitterly. She confessed to him the fault she now so deplored, and prepared to meet his displeasure, as a part of her punishment.

"Poor child!" he said tenderly, as he took her to his arms, "you did but reap what you had sown. Your old habits sprang up and triumphed over you. God grant that it may be the last time you are so punished for the past!"

"But will she ever, ever speak again?" said Belle, anxiously; "shall I hear her call me 'dear daughter' once more?"

"Take comfort, child," said the father, striving to speak cheerfully; "Doctor Taylor gives us much encouragement. Come, and do what you can for your dear mother. She will but remember that you are her daughter whom she tenderly loves."

Poor Belle came humbly back to the sick-room, and gladly went to and fro all day, never thinking of weary foot or trembling hand while she could do something for her own dear, *living* mother.

CONCLUSION.

DAYS and weeks passed by, as slowly, very slowly Mrs. Cortlandt began to recover. Belle was ever at her side, ministering to her wants with skilful tenderness, and nursing her with the judgment of one of riper years.

Mr. Cortlandt, who was obliged to be much from home, felt his dear wife quite safe in the hands of his now self-governed and affectionate daughter.

As the winter wore away, Mrs. Cortlandt's strength in a measure returned, but she was no longer the active, busy head of the household, who had spared others all care, and anticipated their every want. It was now Belle's turn to assume domestic cares, and make home comfortable, and she often felt the value of the homely knowledge she had learned at Miss Ware's and amid the comfort of Tilden farm.

She loved to hear her father praise the neatness of his home and the good management of his daughter, but most of all, she loved to hear her mother say, "Belle, where is Belle? Come, daughter, I want you near me, to feel quite happy."

Belle had arranged her mother's easy-chair in the warmest corner, one winter evening. Side by side they had sat talking of the "better land" in store for all who are faithful unto death.

Willy had seemed an indifferent listener to their conversation in the dim firelight, at least he had sat in perfect silence, with his face turned from the speakers.

"Willy," said the gentle voice of the mother, at length, "shall we not be a family in heaven? will not my only son be there?"

"I hope so, I believe so," said Willy, softly.

Belle put her arm tenderly around her brother, as she murmured, "Oh Willy, I am so full of joy."

"And you well may be," he answered:

"for, under Christ, to you I owe my hope of heaven. Your gentle words, the day of mother's accident, first touched me, and, O how I thank you!"

Belle was too much moved to speak, but she looked upward with deep thankfulness and an humble though rejoicing heart.

"We shall be a family in heaven," said the mother, earnestly.

"Yes," said Mr. Cortlandt; "yes, thank God! Then laying his hand on the head of his daughter, he added, "Yes, choice blessings both in this world and the next must descend on her who has learned so lovingly to keep the Commandment with promise."

THE END.











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